The Devil's Design

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The Devil's Design

by Folie_a_duex

Summary

AU where Will kissed Hannibal in the kitchen instead of getting stabbed, Hannibal then didn't kill Abigail, and they ran away to Florence.

But ghosts from the past are hidden in our own minds, and they haunt even the coldest killer. Hannibal's ghost is Mischa, and Will's ghost?

It might be reality itself.

____
COMPLETE

Notes

So this is gonna update really really really slowly I'm so sorry, but I'll try to make it worth it to anyone who reads this.

Anyways, enjoy the feels overload :)

- Inspired by Paracosm by drinkbloodlikewine, whiskeyandspite

A Not So Shattered Teacup

Water in his lungs, he breathes, gasping for breath and clutching for him.

Jack is in the pantry, Alana is outside in the rain, and Will is pointing a gun at his daughter.

“Abigail?”

She’s standing there, shaking from fear or excitement or anticipation, Will can’t quite tell. All he knows is that Abigail is there, quietly sobbing and shaking.

“I didn’t know what to do so I… I just did what he told me,” she whispers, her voice a broken melody on his ear.

“Where is he?” Will demands once his gun is lowered. Where is the man who did this?

She shakes her head and quivers like a feather in the wind, her lips tugged into a warbling line. Her eyes flick to something behind Will, and his blood goes cold as he realizes who stands behind him. He turns around quickly, staring at Hannibal with wide eyes. He doesn’t know what fills him, fear or relief. Perhaps both. Relief at the sight of Hannibal in one piece, but fear, knowing that Hannibal is still here and not running away like he promised.

“You were supposed to *leave* ,” Will whispers, his voice breaking and filled with urgency.

You were supposed to leave and I was supposed to stay.

“We couldn’t leave without you,” Hannibal murmurs, his eyes glancing over at Abigail.

Will begins shaking as well, and he looks back at Abigail, wondering if she was just another hopeful hallucination. If this was all another fucked up dream his mind has woven for him. But the antlers and the wendigo creature doesn’t lurk in the shadows, and Hannibal is Hannibal before him, not a monster. Not a hallucinated one, at least.

“She’s real, Will,” Hannibal murmurs. “This is real.”

Is it? Or is it all in his head as he enters his watery grave?

Will laughs bitterly, terrified and elated by Hannibal's insight into his mind. This Hannibal is real. This Abigail is… alive. She's alive and breathing and with Hannibal. Will didn't kill Abigail. The relief that washes over him is intoxicating, and he laughs shakily. In this world, he didn't kill Abigail. *Abigail is alive.* He watches his hands holding his gun shake. *Abigail is alive.* He looks back up at Hannibal and tries to smile as Hannibal nears him. *Abigail is alive.* Hannibal's face is painted with blood, and his eyes are filled with this… sadness Will can't quite place.

Why are you in pain? He silently asks. *Why do you mourn? Abigail is alive, I didn't kill her, you didn't kill her, she's safe. She's safe, Hannibal.*

Will shudders and thinks to Jack, who's dying or dead in the pantry. Jack, who was supposed to come here with Will. They were supposed to come together and talk to Hannibal together. Will was supposed to… fight with Hannibal. Kill with him. Kill Jack and run away to God knows where. Anywhere. This was what was intended by them in every world, every version of their lives.

And yet, as he stands there, shaking, he knows he wouldn't have killed Jack. He… couldn't kill Jack. Not in this world. His death is convenient but it isn't… righteous. It isn't redeemed and with purpose. So Will knows that he would have sided with Jack and told Hannibal to run, run away to where no one could ever find him again. Run away to some place in Europe where the wine is sweet and the air is crisp, and people dress to Hannibal's standards. Will would have stayed and lived out his normal life (as normal as it gets for Will, anyways) with his dogs and Alana and Jack and the FBI. He would have tried to escape the marks Hannibal has left in his mind and soul.

In this world.

He would have told Hannibal to leave him, and he would try not to cry as he stands beside Jack. Because this was the righteous thing to do. This *is* the righteous thing to do. Hannibal is dangerous and Will is not like him. Will isn't a killer like Hannibal. Not in this world.

A glint of silver is in Hannibal's hand and suddenly Hannibal's pain all makes sense as Will watches himself through Hannibal's eyes for just a brief moment. Watches himself through his own eyes.

You think I've betrayed you, because you know who I would have stood by.

It takes a moment for Will to react to the hand that cradles his cheek, to the thumb caressing his cheekbone. To that fond but heartbroken expression on Hannibal's face.

"No no no," Will stammers, staggering back and away from Hannibal. *I would have never hurt you. Not now. Not in this world. Not that I finally… see you. I wanted you to run. Run away, for God's sake why didn't you run? I would never kill you because your death would give me nothing. No pleasure, no righteousness, nothing. I can't kill you. Not in any world.*

"Hannibal," Will whispers as Hannibal nears him. Hannibal isn't even stalking towards him, like Will imagines him doing so with all of his past victims. With the people he considered animals only fit for his dinner table.

Hannibal isn't stalking Will like he would with his prey. Hannibal is nearing him the way a parent approaches their crying child, the way Will approaches stray dogs: with caution and love in their eyes.

"Hannibal," Will gasps, trying to force the words out of his mouth, an explanation past his lips. "Why didn't you run?"

He can clearly see the knife in Hannibal's hand, a curved, beautiful thing.

"You were supposed to leave," he whispers, unable to leave, himself, frozen in place. Fear has snatched him and chained his feet to the floor of Hannibal's kitchen, and he can't run. He wants to run, but he can't decide to where. To Abigail? To Alana's body in the rain? To Jack?

To Hannibal?

But the animal in Will understands the need to survive, so he racks his brain for something momentous, something brilliant to stop Hannibal from killing him. To convince Hannibal that

he never wanted to see this beautiful monster burn to ashes. Will can't kill Hannibal, and he can't run away.

So Will throws his mind into overdrive and collides with the construction of Hannibal he has in his mind. Hannibal is nearing him with a knife in hand, because he thinks that Will has betrayed him. He is nearing slowly, because he wants Will to do something about this. But what does he do? He can't fathom the pain in Hannibal's eyes and he can't understand Abigail's presence in the room and —

Oh. Stupid. He should have realized this sooner.

This is out of love. This is how his kind show their love.

Hobbs loved his daughter with a murderous passion, and Hannibal isn't that different. Death encompasses his entire life, and judging by the way Hannibal reaches out to Will, this isn't different from the way Garret Jacob Hobbs slit Abigail's throat.

This is out of love. In every world, this was always his love.

Will wants to laugh at the absurdity of it, of the way Hannibal portrays his love. Hannibal's love is deadly, a madness that has driven Will into the deepest parts of his mind. But Will can't laugh. He can't laugh because he finally *understands.* He can see the possessiveness and adoration and love through Hannibal's eyes, and he can remember the nightmares or dreams he's had about Hannibal's love. Will understands this love, and he knows that this is his ticket to survival. Love.

This is his gift to me. The teacup that dared to come together.

Please work, he whispers in his mind before betting his entire life and sanity on the final step he takes towards Hannibal.

Let me rewrite our tragedy.

Will collides with Hannibal and kisses him with a desperate shudder, dragging Hannibal's body against his own. The knife in Hannibal's hand scrapes against his side, striking fear into Will, but it doesn't touch his flesh and it doesn't draw blood. It instead clatters against the floor with his gun and suddenly Hannibal is pulling Will against him as well, and they're grasping at each other with bloody hands and tears in their eyes. The kiss isn't much to brag about, simply lips against lips, but it's everything Will needs. Contact that explains everything that Will can't say with this fear burning through his body.

I see you. I finally see you.

He's tempted to laugh, but he's also terrified as he kisses Hannibal, the monster of a man who kills to show his love.

Will is hyper aware of every part of Hannibal he is touching, and he memorises each touch that sends fire running through him. Their chests are pressed up against each other firmly, the buttons of their shirts poking each other. His hands are tangled into Hannibal's hair, the fuzz of the shorter parts lightly scraping against his palms. Hannibal's hands are pressed behind his head and between his shoulder blades, guiding him into Hannibal's touch. Their legs are chaotically holding their bodies up, and Will is pretty sure that he's stepping on a bit of Hannibal's left shoe.

Hannibal's lips are soft against his own chapped ones, and they remind Will of water as they slide over the sharp edges of dried dead skin on his lips. Will's own lips quiver against Hannibal's steady lips, as if he was whispering a frantic prayer to this man who represents every beautiful aspect of the devil Will dreams about. Blood stains his cheek and the smell invades Will's senses, but it's natural in this moment. It's always natural. Blood is at every damn crime scene Jack throws him into, blood has been stolen from his body, and blood has bathed the man he's currently kissing.

Blood bathes Hannibal, and Will can't find the will to care, because this is almost dreamlike but it feels so *real.* It's stabbing into Will's soul and he cannot doubt the reality of this desperate bid he's molded into a kiss. This is real. This is the design he makes for himself, in this world.

They break apart moments later, and Hannibal's eyes are filled with a joy that Will can't help but smiling at. This is the real Hannibal Lecter. This is the devil he has sold himself to.

I can't betray you.

I tried.

Trust me, I tried.

But as I stare into your damned eyes and damned soul, I can't run away from the reflection I see, no matter how much I want to. I can't run from this. I can't run from the world you've molded for me.

"Time did reverse," Hannibal murmurs, brushing the wet hair out of Will's eyes. His eyes are fond and filled with this… emotion that Will can't quite name or describe. It has the power of waves crashing against a cliff, or thunder slamming into the sky. "I wanted to surprise you. The teacup that I shattered did come together."

Will shakes and turns in Hannibal's arms to face Abigail.

"A place was made for Abigail in your world," Hannibal murmurs. "For all of us. Together."

Abigail has tears brimming her eyes, and Will's vision is blurred by tears as well.

"Abagail," Hannibal says in a steady voice, holding a hand out for her. "Come to us."

With little hesitation, Abigail breaks away from the place she was frozen at and she runs to Will and Hannibal. She throws herself into Will's opening arms, and he holds her as if these were her last moments. He cries as if these were his last moments.

“Thank you,” Will chokes out, falling to the floor with Abigail in his arms. “Thank you.”

Thank you, I whisper to the Devil, for this world of mended teacups.

The Dead Child

Chapter Notes

> Hiiii everybody! So this chapter is a bit slow and a bit boring (I'm sorry pls don't kill me) BUT IT IS NECESSARY TO INTRODUCE THE FBI SIDE OF THINGS.
>
> The next chapter will be pure Hannigram concerning their travels to Europe, so don't worry. I will write the gay.
>
> Edited: June 30, 2019

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The woman dressed in black rushes down the street and a red umbrella over her head stops the rain from cascading down onto her, instead channeling the water around her like a wall. She wears black boots that splash water from the puddles, but she doesn't seem bothered by this at all. She has only one thing in her mind: her destination.

She arrives at the richly designed house and hesitates in order to stare at the faint lights from inside the house. The front rooms aren't lit, but from what she can see, the kitchen and upstairs have their lights on. They should still be home, then. After a deep breath, she pushes open the gate to the front yard, marching towards the front door with full confidence, but she freezes once she sees the shards of glass reflecting moonlight and lying around the bleeding body. Black and white paint a morbid picture, and looking up, the woman sees the broken window from the second floor.

"Shit," the woman murmurs, running forward and dropping to her knees next to the body. It's a woman dressed in blue and black, and her breath comes in short pants. She numbly recognizes the dying woman as Alana Bloom, the doctor who worked with Will Graham.

"Dr Bloom?" She says, using her umbrella to cover Alana's face. Gently, she brushes a strand of hair and some shards of glass out of Alana's face. "Dr Bloom, can you hear me?"

Alana's eyes peer at her with agony, and she nods ever so slightly before gasping out, "They're gone."

The woman freezes for a moment, a detail going unnoticed by Alana. “Who’s gone?”

Alana shakes her head slightly and moans in pain. “He’s gone,” she whispers before fluttering her eyes shut and breathing deeply.

The woman mutters a curse and pulls out her phone, dialing 911. She quickly informs the man on the phone her situation and location before shoving the phone back in her pocket. Carefully, she positions the umbrella over Alana so it protects her face from the rain, and then she stands and runs to the house. The door is unlocked, and she doesn’t hesitate to barge in.

“Hannibal!” She shouts, storming through the house and arriving at the brightly lit kitchen. “Hannibal!” Her voice sounds like an angry mother calling for her child, and she’s furious as she sees blood pooling out from under a door. *Dammit.*

She opens it to find a half dead black man slumped against the wall. *Agent Crawford* , her mind quietly reminds her. She makes no move to help him, knowing that the police are on their way anyways, and instead rushes off to search the rest of the house. Doors are thrown open and she shouts Hannibal’s name a few more times, storming through the house and pounding down the stairs, but she knows that he’s gone. He made his bloody exit and now he’s probably on his way to France or Italy or Germany or somewhere no one will know his name.

She makes her way back to the kitchen, and standing in the middle of it, she kicks the cabinet doors laughs bitterly, hanging her head in defeat before craning her neck to look at the white ceiling. The light shines on her face and reveals what the rain has stained: a striking image of Hannibal.

“Of course you’d disappear now,” she murmurs. “Just as soon as I made up my mind.”

Sighing, she runs back out to Alana in the rain, crouching down and keeping the dying woman company. “You don’t happen to know where they ran off to, do you?” She asks Alana, but her question goes unheard.

The ambulances and police arrive within the next minute, apparently looking for a man who called for them. So someone else was here before her. Did Hannibal call the police, just for the fun of it? Or maybe Graham did?

She explains her situation to them and they are quick to tend to the bodies and interrogate her.

“Your name, ma’am?” One of them ask her.

She clears her throat “Annabelle DuBois. D-u-B-o-i-s,” she murmurs. “Do you need a middle name?”

The man shakes his head. “This should be enough for now, but we would like to ask some more questions later, especially when the FBI get here.”

DuBois nods. “Of course.”

She answers some more questions, answering all but a few with complete honesty. She tells them that she was walking to the bus station when she saw Alana on the ground, and she has no idea whose house this is. Yes, she saw Jack Crawford inside, but she didn’t want to touch him, since she was afraid of making any more damage. No, she does not know Hannibal Lecter and did not see anyone else besides Dr Bloom and Agent Crawford.

They let her go after a fair amount of questions, promising to call her later. She nods with a sad smile, and calls a taxi to take her home.

You just had to leave the night I made up my mind, didn’t you, Hannibal?

~O~

Jack Crawford is pissed as fuck, and a very specific cannibal is going to suffer the terrible wrath of one Agent Crawford.

Will Graham - the jewel of Crawford's blood-tainted and madness molded crown - is missing. Has been kidnapped. Is being held hostage by none other than the great Chesapeake Ripper. And it's *all* Jack's fault. Jack shouldn't have pushed Will to the edge like this. Jack should have seen Hannibal's evil quicker. Jack should have believed Will when he saw what no one else could.

The monster in Hannibal Lecter.

So, Jack mourns, pacing the room and rubbing his forehead with a heavy hand that smells faintly of metal. Alana sits in the room with him, her eyes falsely cold and her mouth in a thin line. She's recently been released from intensive care, and now she hobbles around with a cane and an intense atmosphere of anger following her. She sighs deeply and clasps her hands together in her lap, looking up at and preparing for her next words.

"We did everything we could," she whispers.

Jack shakes his head. "No. We didn't." He turns almost violently towards Alana and stalks towards her. "Will saw him. Will *saw* the damned Chesapeake Ripper, the Copycat Killer, *Hannibal the damned Cannibal* and none of us believed him. None of us! Will Graham has never been wrong about these things and yet I still didn't believe him!" He sighs and plops down on the armrest of the couch Alana perches on. "And now Will is gone. Dead, for all I know."

Alana shakes her head. "If Will were dead, Hannibal would make sure we knew."

Jack laughs bitterly at that. "Would we? Or would some innocent guest at his dinner table be tasting him?"

"Hannibal wouldn't," Alana whispers.

"You sure?" Jack says, standing again and walking towards the window, glaring out. "Because none of know how Hannibal thinks. None of us. Only Will can grasp the mindset

Hannibal lives in. Only Will."

"And Hannibal knew that," Alana says with gentle force. "He knew Will could see him for what he really is, and he would cherish that. He wouldn't just throw him away."

Jack nods. "I hope you're right."

Alana nods. "Me too," she murmurs, her words lost to Jack's ears.

A knock startles the both of them, and Alana clears her throat as Jack walks to the door and opens it. A bright-eyed woman stands there, a kind smile on her lips. She has pale gold hair pinned up into a low bun and a maroon coat on.

"Ms DuBois," Jack says, stepping to the side and allowing the woman to enter. "Thank you for coming."

Ms DuBois bows her head quickly and smiles. "Thank you for seeing me." She turns her head to Alana and flashes her a small smile. This woman seems to kind and innocent, sending nostalgia through Alana. Was she once like this?

"Please, sit," Jack says, gesturing to the seat across from Alana and Ms DuBois quickly sits down, crossing her ankles underneath her seat. Jack takes his seat next to Alana, and he laces his fingers and looks to DuBois.

Her eyes keep flicking everywhere, and Alana would almost peg her as nervous. But she isn't, only taking in everything in the room. She doesn't meet their eyes for long periods of time, only glancing at their eyes and then looking at other features of their faces. Alana notices that she focuses on both of their lips and eyebrows. Strange.

"Ms DuBois, I apologize about the… atmosphere and chaos at the FBI. I know it must have been hectic while you were trying to get in contact with us," Jack says, leaning forward and staring firmly at DuBois, his gaze unrelenting and unforgiving.

DuBois shakes her head. “No no, it’s fine. Understandable. Hannibal the Cannibal was unleashed, I would be worried if you weren’t in chaos.”

Alana chuckles shortly, sighing lightly after. “Are people actually calling him that?”

DuBois shrugs. “Freddie Lounds has great power over the media of murder and crime.”

Jack sighs. “Too true.”

“Do you mind if we move to first name basis?” Alana asks, trying to gauge DuBois’ mindset in this situation. Jack subtly looks at her with eyes that scream, *what the hell are you doing?* But Alana ignores him.

DuBois shrugs slightly. “Annabelle Procel DuBois. I hate my first name, so if we attempt to create a more casual and personal atmosphere, call me Procel.”

Alana nods. “Procel, then?”

Procel smiles. “Sure, *Alana.”*

Jack gives Alana another not so subtle questioning look, but Alana doesn’t meet his eyes. She’s too caught up in Procel’s suddenly challenging gaze which bores into her skull, absolutely no fear or shame present in her eyes. Why the sudden drastic change?

Jack clears his throat and gets on with business. “So, Ms DuBois,” he says. Both Alana and Procel note Jack’s refusal to call her by her personal name. “We received your recommendation from Dr Hummel in Washington a few weeks ago.”

Procel nods.

“He seemed to have a lot of faith in your abilities of tracking down killers,” Jack says. “Strange for you to be the one to find the leftovers of one of our biggest killers here.”

Procel narrows her eyes playfully at Jack. “This sounds a lot like an accusation, *Agent* Crawford,” She drawls, suddenly seeming very cheeky.

Jack shrugs slowly. “We have to cover all of our bases.”

Procel nods. “Understandable. But I assure you, I’m not linked to Hannibal.”

Jack gives her a playful disbelieving look, and Alana is tempted to give him her best bitchface. She’ll settle for her third best.

“You show up to work in Will Graham’s area the moment Will Graham is taken out of the picture,” Jack says. “It’s one hell of a coincidence.”

“Jack,” Alana hisses lowly at him, but Jack merely waves her off.

“Like I said, we’re just covering all of our bases,” Jack says sweetly, but everyone in the room can smell the sour tinge to his words.

Procel smiles. “Of course. You wouldn’t want to let yet another monster into your inner circle.”

Alana’s eyes widen at Procel’s words, and Jack is doing his best to keep his rage inside. She’s right. He doesn’t want to let another monster into his inner circle. But he also doesn’t want to lose another friend. He lost Miriam. He lost Will. He doesn’t want this smiling, rebellious psychologist to be lost as well.

Jack manages a halfhearted chuckle. “You’ve got some spunk in you, DuBois,” he says, forcing his mind onto better things.

Procel ducks her head in sudden shame and her face is ablaze with a blush. Alana hears her mutter, “Oh my lord why did I say that,” and she has to smile at that. Procel seems like an interesting soul, and Alana could use some innocents in her life.

The rest of the conversation continues without many offensive comments, and afterwards, Procel apologizes profusely to Jack and he smiles at her and tells her it’s okay. She is right, after all.

Alana walks Procel out to the parking lot, and they make small talk as they walk.

“Why do you hate the name Annabelle?” Alana asks as they walk towards the elevator.

Procel smiles softly and presses the button for the ground floor. “That stupid horror movie with the doll. I hate horror films.”

Alana laughs gently. “And yet you want to work with the FBI.”

Procel shrugs, leaning against the mirror in the elevator. “I can do something about the cases I’m given. I can catch the killer. Doesn’t mean I enjoy it, though.”

Alana looks at her inquisitively. “Then why do it?”

“Because I need to,” Procel murmurs. “I’m good at it and I have a promise to keep. I’ve seen too much shit in the world to just ignore it.”

Alana nods and they don’t speak again until they exit the building.

“Jack will send you a call when we get another case,” Alana says. “And maybe even ask for your opinion on how to catch Hannibal.”

Procel nods, putting her hands in the pockets of her red coat. “As much as Agent Crawford distrusts me, I would like to help in the search for Hannibal.”

Alana laughs shortly. “Well, as much as Agent Crawford hates to admit it, we need all the help we can get.”

“Oh yes,” Procel murmurs as they near Alana’s car. “He won’t be an easy one to find.”

They exchange goodbyes and Alana climbs into her car and Procel walks over to her motorcycle, unlocking the seat to retrieve her helmet, and she waves to Alana as she drives away. Climbing on, she drives back home and contemplates her next move with the FBI.

~O~

A phone is buzzing terribly loudly at god knows when in the morning.

If it’s that jackass from the bar, I’m killing him, Procel mutters in her mind as she fumbles for her cell phone on the table next to her bed. She squints as the light from the phone stabs into her eyes, and she barely makes out the time (3:32 AM) and the caller ID (Crawford).

This better be interesting.

“‘Ello?” She grumbles into the phone, not even bothering to sound professional.

“Ms DuBois! Glad to see you’re awake,” Jack says from the other end.

“Is there a reason why you’ve called?” She mutters as she sits up on the bed.

“There is, actually,” Jack says, his tone dropping into something more serious. “There’s been a murder. I want your opinion on it.”

Procel laughs bitterly. “You want me to read the scene like Graham does?”

Jack is silent for a moment, and she hears him take in a sharp breath. “Yeah,” he finally says. “I want you to read the scene.”

“Text me the address and I’ll be there as soon as I can,” Procel says before hanging up and swinging her legs off the bed. She groans and hangs her head as she glares at the clock on her phone.

3:34 AM.

Grumbling, she drags herself off the bed and into the bathroom, quickly brushing her teeth and combing her hair and pulling it into something decent. She pulls out black and blue clothes, hoping that they won't create too much of a fashion disaster, and she’s out the door with her black boots tugged loosely onto her feet.

The air is refreshingly crisp in the mornings, but when it’s 3:40 AM, not so much. But, she ignores the cold as she pulls on her helmet because she needs to impress Crawford. He’s probably calling her just to make he prove her worth, anyways. She can’t just back down, she has to prove him wrong. She is worth everything in this shitty world.

The address is plugged into her phone (through Waze, a god-sent app) and she glances at the map before putting in her headphones and listening to a monotone Siri-like voice tell her where to go. Surprisingly, she doesn’t get lost, and she’s at the location in twelve minutes.

It’s an old house in the poorer parts of the area, and there is already a small fleet of police mulling about the property. Someone spots her once she removes her helmet and they wave

her over as they half jog towards her.

"You're DuBois, right?" The man says, a scruffy beard on his face along with shadows under his eyes. "The new - " he clears his throat, preventing himself from saying *the new Will Graham,* "- the new criminal profiler?"

Procel smiles kindly and sticks out her hand with a small nod in greeting.

The man takes it and shakes her hand with a single, firm movement. "I'm Brian Zeller, I do all of the science-y details around here."

"No he doesn't," another man grumbles as he shuffles into the scene, a box under his arm. "Jimmy Price," he says, extending his hand to Procel. "The other half of the science-y team."

Procel shakes his hand and smiles. "Pleasure to meet you."

The man scoffs but smiles at her. "Come on, Jack is sulking inside. Don't wanna keep him waiting."

"Nope," Zeller agrees, marching towards the eerie house.

Procel follows them in, a small smile on her face. She likes this team, they seem humorous and members of the better part of humanity. The house is filled with photographers and little numbered stands, marking the place with the sterile study of death. Zeller and Price seem to be at home in this environment, making small comments to each other about various things, including… bees? Procel isn't sure.

Jack is in the kitchen - where the victim lies dead - and his hands are in pockets as he angrily glares at the body on the floor. He glances up when he hears Zeller and Price entering, and he meets Procel's steady gaze.

“You know,” Jack says to Procel. “After nearly dying at Hannibal’s hand, I considered leaving the FBI. Resigning. Living a life away from all of this…” He gestures to the body and the blood. “Death.”

Procel stands beside him and looks down at the bloody heap of a body, and she hums quietly. “Believe it or not, Agent Crawford, I’m not surprised that you stayed.”

Jack laughs shortly. “And why is that?”

She shrugs. “Strength. Or rather, a demand for it. Hannibal nearly killed you, and I assume a part of you wants to keep living the way you always have as a way to… prove him wrong.”

Jack nods slowly, pursing his lips and not disagreeing. “Perhaps.” He sighs and looks down at the body. “Misha Williams. Thirty eight years old, lived alone, worked part time at John Hopkins, and murdered a few hours ago. Neighbors heard screaming, and soon enough, we found this.”

Procel nods. *You were named Misha? Funny.*

“Everyone clear!” Jack bellows, and the everyone in the room (minus Zeller and Price) scurry away like startled mice. He rubs his forehead before taking a deep breath before leaning closer to Procel and whispering in a slow and deliberate voice, “What do you see?”

Procel squats down to more closely inspect the body, and music begins filters into her mind. She closes her eyes, letting the appropriate music fill her mind, and she smirks when My Chemical Romance fills her mind. Of course it would be MCR. Oh well, she can work with this.

Well it rains and it pours when you're out on your own
If I crash on the couch, can I sleep in my clothes
'Cause I spent the night dancing, I'm drunk I suppose
If it looks like I'm laughing
I'm really just asking to leave this alone

A man stalks into the room, a sick delight ablaze in his face.

You're in time for the show
You're the one that I need
I'm the one that you loathe
You can watch me corrode
Like a beast in repose
'Cause I love all the poison away with the boys in the band

He shakes with anticipation, high on the thrill of the kill

I've really been on a bender and it shows
So why don't you blow me
A kiss before she goes

The music ringing in Procel's mind means nothing to him, of course, but the music guides Procel through the scene, setting the tone of this murder.

Give me a shot to remember
And you can take all the pain away from me

He slams a blunt object against his victim's head - that's all she is, an unfortunate victim to his delights - and Procel pauses, wondering what it is he used. A frying pan? There is a bloody one a few feet away, so Procel assumes that must be the initial weapon he used.

Your kiss and I will surrender
The sharpest lives are the deadliest to lead
A light to burn all the empires

There is delight in this kill. But not a calculated delight, like the way Hannibal delighted in his kills, no, this is different. Very different.

So bright the sun is ashamed to rise and be
In love with all of these vampires
So you can leave like the sane, abandon me

This is a child playing with paint with his hands.

There's a place in the dark where the animals go
You can take off your skin in the cannibal glow

He has made this woman puddy in the most basic sense in his hands, and she can imagine some insane child laughing as they beat this poor woman to death.

Juliet loves the beat and the lust it commands
Drop the dagger and lather the blood on your hands, Romeo

And this death isn’t a reaction to something. This kill was planned, but the plan itself was lacking.

I've really been on a bender and it shows
So why don't you blow me
A kiss before she goes

Kill the lady and delight in it.

Give me a shot to remember
And you can take all the pain away from me
Your kiss and I will surrender
The sharpest lives are the deadliest to lead
A light to burn all the empires

Run away.

So bright the sun is ashamed to rise and be
In love with all of these vampires
So you can leave like the sane, abandon me

Giggle as he falls into his den of nightmares.

Give me a shot to remember
And you can take all the pain away from me
Your kiss and I will surrender
The sharpest lives are the deadliest to lead
A light to burn all the empires

Smile as he daydreams about his next kill.

So bright the sun is ashamed to rise and be
In love with all of these vampires
So you can leave like the sane, abandon me

"This is a child," Procel murmurs as she stands, facing Jack. "This wasn't anger, self defense, or a reaction to something. This was pure… delight." Nothing special. Nothing too dangerous.

Jack nods and contemplates her words for a moment. "Will he kill again?"

Procel nods. "And his next victim will suffer a lot more than this one did," she murmurs, cringing at the way Zeller pokes at the wounds. "This was a trial run."

Jack laughs bitterly. "Excellent. Z, what have we got?"

Zeller looks up quickly and explains the lack of fingerprints with a smile on his face. Strange person. Cute, but strange. As far as Zeller and Price can tell, there isn't anything to identify the killer with. Everything was horribly chaotic, but there isn't any blood, fingerprints, DNA, hair, or anything incriminating.

"The guy's clean," Zeller muses as he pokes and prods at the lump once known as Ms Williams' face. "And this lady is a mess. Nothing classy about this kill."

"You sound like you miss Hannibal's kills," Procel comments, quietly.

She'd held expected Zeller to laugh or at least crack a half hearted smile, but his expression droops and suddenly he's solemn.

"Maybe," he whispers, shifting in his crouch to poke at another part of the body. "But Hannibal is just as sick as this guy."

Procel shrugs. "Just in a different manner. A much… neater manner."

Price is the one who laughs now, although bitterly. "Sure. Neat! That's a way to put it."

Jack sighs and puts a heavy hand on Procel's shoulder. "We lost people to Hannibal," he murmurs to Procel as Prize and Zeller quietly bicker away about stitches. "Beverly Katz, the third member of the forensics team, found Hannibal's identity and went to find evidence."

Procel eyes Jack carefully, watching how his composure breaks and the darkness builds in his eyes.

"She found the evidence, that's for sure," he mutters, more to himself than to Procel. He clears his throat before continuing. "Hannibal killed her and displayed her. He split her body into slits and put them in glass displays, for all the world to see."

Procel vaguely remembers something about a death like this, involving the Ripper (aka Hannibal). She remembers being horrified.

~O~

Alana and Procel sit at a table at a fairly decent bar, drinking wine instead of beer and talking about murder. Alana asks about the case Jack has given her, and Procel explains the basic of the scenario. A man who has become addicted to the thrill of the kill and the power it gives someone. The freedom and insanity it gives people.

The standard killer, Procel thinks. But she can't help thinking of that poor lady's name, Misha. It probably means nothing, but it's one hell of a coincidence. A woman named Misha dies the moment Hannibal runs away. Again.

"So, Ms DuBois," Alana drawls as she takes a sip of her wine. "Why the FBI? Why not some small police force or the academy?"

Procel scoffs as she drinks a sip of her own drink. "The usual things. Tragic backstory and the need for vengeance."

"Is Hannibal a part of your vengeance?" Alana asks, watching Procel with scrutinizing eyes.

Procel smiles wryly. "I am not here on a mission to exact my revenge upon Hannibal, Alana. I have nothing personal against the man. I have never met him and I don't plan to ever meet him. However, I have met his kind. Creatures that think they're something equal to *God,* so they dangle their victims like puppets and display them to the world, showing off their beauty in death."

Alana's eyes narrow, contemplating her word choice. "Why use the word puppets? I mean, I agree with you completely about your point, but I feel like what Hannibal does isn't… puppeteering. It's manipulation, yes, but… he gives them free will and manipulates the choices they can make, rather than blinding them completely and using them to kill people."

"Perhaps. I think Hannibal sees us less as puppets and more as… animals. Simple things that can be easily taught tricks." Procel leans back and drinks another sip. "But concerning your question about puppets, remember that killer in Washington? The Puppeteer?"

She nods. "He was caught eventually, right?"

Procel nods. "I caught him."

Alana smiles and bows her head. “Good job.”

“Thank you. Like I’ve said, my job here does not concern revenge or tragedy. I am here because I want to do what others cannot. But, I *was* chasing the Puppeteer for very personal reasons.”

Alana’s eyes soften in understanding. “You lost someone to him.”

Procel nods. “I did. A bit of backstory: I was married some years ago, and it was a good marriage, nothing tragic or dramatically beautiful. I was young, so was he, and we just kind of fell into place together. He died in a car crash, nothing special, so I was left alone with our little girl, Gail.”

Alana doesn’t look away from Procel.

“As a single mom, I was busy,” Procel says slowly, a small smile on her lips and sadness in her eyes. “I worked three jobs and was trying to get my psychology degree so I could finally begin practice. I was working at a museum at the time, I think, and a neighbor was watching Gail. Normal routine for our family. I came back home after… three or four hours? Something like that. The door was open when I got home, and at first, I thought nothing of it, assuming that the neighbor had opened it to let in some air or something.”

Alana watches her carefully, watching for a sign of madness or a need for revenge in Procel’s eyes, but she can’t find it. Not yet.

“So I walked in, calling out for Gail.” Procel touches her fingertips to her lips as she prepares for her next words. “But, in the living room, the neighbor was dead, beaten into a bloody pulp on the floor. I didn’t even bother to check if she was alive. She barely looked human anymore. So instead, I ran upstairs to my bedroom (where Gail usually hides when she’s scared) and there she was…”

Alana sees bitterness in Procel’s eyes for a short moment, and then pain. A soft, elegant, pain.

“Gail was strung up above my bed, her eyes replaced with glass and her wounds filled with plaster,” Procel whispers softly. “She was four. Only four. Shy child. Liked to draw all over the walls. And there she was, strung up like a puppet.” She takes in a deep breath before continuing. “A child will one day lose their parents to time, but a parent should *never* have to face their child’s death. Time doesn’t take children away from us. Nature doesn’t let us see our creations die. Cruelty does.”

Alana tries to understand the bitterness in Procel’s eyes. “I wish I could offer some form of comfort.”

Procel shrugs. “It was years ago, so I’ve learned to… live with her ghost in my shadow. But now, I’ve promised myself that I will never… *never* let another mother suffer the same fate I did.”

Alana nods slowly. “But you have to realize that not all monsters will be caught,” she says carefully, hunting for the madness in Procel’s eyes.

Procel gives Alana a glimpse of the madness she seeks, and it sends tremors running down her spine. The look of insanity disappears as soon as it comes, but it sends Alana back into another room, the smell of wine filling her head and a firm touch on her waist.

“But Hannibal will be,” Procel murmurs. “The Puppeteer was caught. This… amateur will be caught. And so will Hannibal.”

“What makes you so sure?” Alana asks, leaning towards Procel, the glass of wine still in her hands and the smell still lurking in her mind. She sees Hannibal’s smile, his devilish smirk, in her mind and on Procel’s own lips.

Procel smiles gently, almost sweetly, her eyes dark like rich chocolate. “Because I am going to catch them.”

Alana nods and purses her lips. “You think you can catch Hannibal? He has been hiding from the law for… his entire life.”

Procel smirks. “Oh he’ll be caught. And you want to know why?” She takes the silence as a yes. “Because Hannibal has something to protect, now.” She sips at her wine and smiles widely at Alana. “He would do anything for Abigail and Will.”

Alana stiffens at the mention of Hannibal’s captives, the memory of Will’s kiss on her lips and her betrayal when she arguably went running to Hannibal. “Why do you think he took them?”

Procel scoffs. “He didn’t take them.”

“Sorry?”

“He didn’t take them,” Procel repeats. “He didn’t… kidnap Abigail and Will. That isn’t a victory to Hannibal. Abigail is his *daughter* , and he loves her the same way Hobbs loved his daughter: with blood and death. Will is the only one who understands Hannibal, and he wouldn’t just… kidnap him. He would persuade him. Beg him to run away with him.”

Alana bites at her cheek. “If that’s true, Will and Abigail are-”

“Guilty,” Procel mutters. “Murderers.”

Alana hangs her head. “Yes. As brutal as it is, they will be considered murderers in the eyes of the law.”

“And you don’t want that to happen,” Procel confirms.

“I can’t allow that to happen,” Alana mutters into her wine glass. “I won’t let Will and Abigail be blinded by Hannibal.”

“They aren’t blind, Alana,” Procel murmurs. “Will especially. He knows exactly what Hannibal is. He was the first one to realize it, after all.”

“And Abigail?”

“She knows that Hannibal is a killer,” Procel says. “She knows he’s a cannibal. But so was her father. Hannibal is the only person besides Will who knows her inside out and can give her the life she once had.”

“The life she had? That was the life of an innocent,” Alana says, echoing the thoughts of herself before Hannibal got inside her.

“You still believe she’s innocent?” Procel asks. “Even after she threw you out the window?”

Alana looks away. “I want to. I don’t want to taint the pure image I had of her.”

Procel nods. “Understandable.”

“But I know that… I know that she knew about the killings,” Alana admits. “I just didn’t want to believe it.”

“And now she knows about even more killings,” Procel points out. “She can’t pull the innocent card anymore.”

Alana scoffs. “She still can. Hannibal, according to the news, has kidnapped her. She’s being held hostage.”

“And yet no demands are being made,” Procel says. “Wait till Lounds gets her claws into that point.”

“Freddie Lounds is ours,” Alana says, almost proudly. “There will be no point to dig into.”

Procel gives her a congratulatory look. “Impressive. You chained the storm of a woman.”

Alana laughs shortly. “Not us. Will. He was the one who tied a leash around her neck and strapped her to the FBI.”

“This was during the courtship thing, correct?” Procel asks. “When her supposed body was displayed in three different ways?”

Alana raises a brow. “Courtship? What makes you say that?”

“Everything,” Procel says. “Two murderers showing their skills to each other in the gentlest ways. Love notes.”

Alana doesn’t say anything, remembering the horror of believing Will was the one being courted.

“And now they’re probably married somewhere in France,” Procel mutters.

“They?”

“Hannibal and Will.”

Alana has to fight back the rage in her eyes.

“Will’s plan succeeded,” Procel murmurs. “He has completely, utterly seduced Hannibal Lecter.”

“How do you know this?” Alana whispers.

Procel smiles. “I know people like Hannibal. I know how they work. And because Will knows Hannibal and knows that in order to survive, Hannibal has to be smitten with him and unable to harm him. And I also gossiped with Jack and Hannibal’s psychiatrist.”

“DuMaurier?” Alana asks.

Procel nods. “Lovely woman, she is. Very poetic as well. Reminds me of Athena, or Hera. Godlike and powerful in the quietest sense.”

Alana nods. “She is.”

Procel hums in agreement. “And she told me something that I think perfectly fits Will and Abigail’s scenario concerning their guilt. ‘What Hannibal does is not coercion - ’”

“‘ - it is persuasion,’” Alana finishes.

Procel nods slowly, deeply. “They are guilty, Alana. But luckily for us, Hannibal loves them. He loves Will, he loves Abigail, so when the time comes - and it will - he will ensure that they are innocent.”

~O~

Alana wants Hannibal dead. She won’t lie about that. Hannibal made her a promise and he *always* keeps his promises.

“Walk away, I’ll make no plans to call on you. But if you stay, I will kill you. Be blind, Alana. Don’t be brave.”

So, if she wants to live a long, fulfilling life without becoming dinner, Hannibal has to be *out* of the picture.

Enter Mason Verger, this crazy, rich madman with the perfect plan to take Hannibal down and absolutely no mercy on his mind. A part of Alana is horrified and disgusted when she hears Mason's plan, but another part - the more dominant part of her mind these days - is… delighted. The idea of making Hannibal suffer just as he has done to so many, it's elating. He'll be gone from her life, the sword hanging over her head will be gone, and he will suffer the death he deserves. He'll probably even be proud of Mason for constructing such a horrible death, Alana tells herself. Who cares about morals, now, when Hannibal's death is finally a tangible thing?

However, Hannibal isn't the only one the picture Mason wants to paint.

Will is also on Mason's menu - since he stood by and did nothing as Mason ate his own face off - and by extension, so is Abigail. Mason doesn't care who dies or who gets in the way of what he wants. And that means that if Mason finds Hannibal first, Will and Abigail will die right alongside him.

That doesn't sit right with Alana.

She tells herself that they knew the risks when they ran away with Hannibal. She tells herself that Will has killed people, just like Hannibal. She tells herself that Abigail chose to stay with killers, and that she could have left him a long time ago if she wanted to.

She tells herself that Hannibal hasn't blinded them like he blinded her.

So she stays with Mason and his sister, searching for Hannibal and plotting his death. Mason takes great delight in poking fun at Alana's previous relationship with Hannibal, and while Alana once would have been horrified and left the house instantly, she kept put. Yes, Hannibal got deeper into her than he did anyone else, literally speaking. Yes, she was in a sexual relationship with him. Yes, she knew Hannibal more intimately than most. Yes, yes, yes. She can deal these jokes, as frustrating and crass as they are. She can deal with Mason because Mason is her ticket to her safety and Hannibal's death.

However, Mason also likes to take a poke at Will.

Will, the bride of Frankenstein. Will, the man who seduced Hannibal. Will, the goddamn martyr. Will, the true love of Hannibal. Will, the lonely monster's companion. Will, the devil's lover.

Alana can handle her own name being tarnished by this madman. She can handle the sex jokes about her and Hannibal. It's all in the past. But Will… she can't handle Will's name being spat on, because a small part of her agrees with Mason. Will knew Hannibal, saw Hannibal, long before anyone believed him. Will seduced Hannibal in every sense of the word, and Alana was powerless as she watched the two stalk around each other like lions.

She's seen the way Hannibal looks at Will, the way his gaze softens and his lips quirk up into a small smile, just for Will. The way his eyes lingered on Will's features, committing them to memory. And she also saw the pain in Will's eyes when she rejected him and the pain in his eyes when he realized she was sleeping with Hannibal. She saw how he left her behind in the dust, running after Hannibal instead.

It hurts, realizing that Will has willingly run to a monster.

~O~

The new killer is caught a week later, with Procel standing over him with a gun pushed against his temple and her phone against her ear.

Jack is delighted when he sees her, covered in blood, and she merely shrugs it off.

"You caught the killer before Freddie Lounds could even name him," Jack exclaims in disbelief, rubbing his forehead. "You caught him with your own bare hands."

Procel shrugs again, wiping at the blood off her gloves and shaking the hair out of her eyes. “I know how to catch the monsters, but don’t… don’t let Lounds publish anything about me. Take all the credit. I don’t want any.”

Jack’s face says, *why?,* but he stays professional and pats her on the shoulder. “You’ve done well. Let the medics clean you up and then give Alana and I the breakdown of how you caught him. Lounds won’t know anything.”

Procel nods.

Procel is very numb as she goes through the standard procedure of things. Dull and emotionless as a medic cleans her small wounds and bandages them. Alana watches her from across the crime scene, a bit numb herself as she glances at the murderer covered in his own blood and kneeling in the filth. Procel did that, and Alana is honestly a bit terrified of the woman whose blond hair is now tainted with a rusty color.

“Alana,” Jack whispers to her as they watch Procel. “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?”

Alana looks at him incredulously. “We can’t. We don’t know her.”

“Neither does Hannibal,” Jack points out. “Now, obviously there will be further screening that needs to be done and some questions to be asked, but she is our best bet.”

“At finding Hannibal?” Alana asks. “It’s too risky.”

“Everything is risky,” Jack presses, stepping in front of her as she tries to walk away. “But she is the ticket to his capture.”

“She could die,” Alana points out. “Are you ready to lose another agent? Another pawn on your chessboard?”

Jack shakes his head and rubs his forehead. “Will is out there, alone with a monster.”

“He ran with Hannibal,” Alana points out. “He chose to run away with him.”

Jack shakes his head, biting at his lip and looking desperately to Alana. “Will isn’t a killer. He understands killers, yes, but he isn’t a killer. Hannibal would have killed him if he tried to leave him, so running away *with* him was his best option!”

“And if we chase after Hannibal, we might lose Procel, Will, and more,” Alana hisses. “This is too dangerous a bet.”

“Letting Hannibal go is too dangerous a bet,” Jack mutters. “DuBois is our best bet.”

Alana shakes her head and thinks about Mason Verger’s plan. She’s using Mason to kill Hannibal so why is she so… against using Procel to find him? Her thoughts recently have been purely selfish, card after card laid on the table in order to survive. Survival is the only thing on her mind. So maybe with Procel, she is against the idea because Procel isn’t going to find Hannibal in order to kill him. She isn’t fighting with everything she has, whereas Hannibal will be. Hannibal won’t hesitate to kill her and serve her to his new, innocent dinner guests.

“She could bring Will home,” Jack says gravely, a pained and almost guilty look in his eyes. “He could finally rest.”

Alana walks away, leaving the scene and slipping into her car. Once inside, she throws her head back against the seat and groans softly. Procel could do what Mason refuses to do: bring Will safely home.

How on earth could she say no to that?

~O~

Alana rushes out of the Verger mansion, trying to look like she isn't rushing out of the Verger mansion.

Hannibal is in Florence. Mason knows Hannibal is in Florence. Dammit, why did she tell him? Why did she let him find him?

She pulls out her phone hastily and scrolls through quickly in an attempt to find Jack's number.

"Dammit, where is it?" She hisses under her breath.

She has to tell Jack so they can get a head start. Mason is relying on bounty hunters and money, but Jack can send someone there *right now.* That'll either scare Hannibal out of Florence so Will and Abigail will be safe or catch them before Mason kills them. Either way, Will will be safer than he will be with Mason Verger.

"Goin' somewhere?" A voice drawls from behind Alana, and she spins around wildly to face then.

Margot Verger is standing there, sauntering down the stairs and looking at Alana with a perfect raised eyebrow. She has this perfect little smirk on her face and it freezes Alana on the spot.

"Margot," Alana says, shoving her phone into her pocket. "Can I help you?"

Margot laughs haughtily and nears Alana with a disbelieving look. "Can I help *you?* You look like the kid who got caught with their hand in the cookie jar."

Alana forces a laugh. "Maybe."

Margot looks at her, expecting something more, and sighs when Alana remains silent. “You seem awfully conflicted about my brother’s plan, Dr Bloom,” Margot points out. “Wanna talk me through it? Share some sob stories?”

Alana scoffs. “Do you have any you’re willing to share?”

Margot shrugs and takes a step closer to Alana. “Why not? I’ve got nothing to lose. I’ve already lost everything I wanted.”

Alana looks at Margot from head to toe and thinks, *why not?* “Sure.”

Margot smirks. “Excellent. You wanna talk over beer or wine?”

“Wine,” Alana says as they begin walking towards her car. “I can’t stomach beer after I found out what Hannibal was putting inside mine.”

Margot scoffs. “More like *who* he was putting in your beer.”

Alana nods. “You’re not wrong,” she mutters as she climbs into the car.

“I’m rarely ever wrong,” Margot says while buckling herself in. “Except when it comes to how far my brother will go to get what he wants. That… that, I’m usually wrong about.”

“He’s unpredictable enough. No one blames you for not knowing what his next move is,” Alana says kindly, automatically falling into psychiatrist mode.

Margot laughs loudly in one short burst. “I know. No one blames me and they have no right to blame me. But it still *sucks,* now knowing when he’s going to stab you in the back next.”

Alana glances over worriedly at Margot. “Why does that sound like a literal statement?”

Margot looks over at her with a mocking expression. “Because, sadly, it is a literal statement. I’ll show you the scars later, don’t worry. I’m an awfully open person about these things, especially when I’m *this* close to someone who can give me children.” She puts her forefinger and thumb close together and throws a sarcastic smirk at Alana.

Alana doesn’t understand the last statement, but she knows that she will in due time. Margot is a good person to stand by when faced with Mason’s fanatics. She’s also slightly insane, so Alana takes comfort in that. She doesn’t know if she can ever go back to spending time with normal, undamaged people. People who worry about bills and grades rather than murderers and insanity.

“So, I’m assuming we’re going to your place and *not* mine, since I kinda have a psychopathic brother in there,” Margot says as Alana begins driving through the long, winding paths from the mansion. “Or just a bar or something, if you wanna.”

Alana casts a glance at Margot. “Would you prefer coming over to my house?”

Margot shrugs. “Why not. I can comfortably strip there.”

Alana chuckles and a small smile stays on her lips for the remainder of the drive.

~O~

“Not gonna lie, Dr Bloom, that honestly sucks,” Margot murmurs as she downs another glass of whiskey.

Alana laughs bitterly. “Yeah. It is.”

Margot scoffs and leans towards Alana from her place on the couch. “Wanting to murder the killer, but also being in love with said killer’s husband.”

Alana rolls her eyes and sighs heavily. “I’m not in love with Will. I just don’t want to see him get hurt. I’ve grown attached.”

Margot nods heavily and shrugs her shoulders a bit. “Understandable. Will seems like an interesting guy. Great in bed, as well.”

Alana chokes on her own spit and she stares incredulously at Margot. “What?”

Margot eyes Alana. “What? You didn’t know?” When Alana shakes her head, Margot’s eyes widen and she puts down her glass and clasps her hands together. “Well, Dr Bloom, this seems like the perfect moment to transition into my sob story.”

Alana opens her mouth to speak, but Margot cuts her off.

“Sh, I’m not changing the subject. I’m *leading* into another one,” Margot says.

Alana gives her a slightly disapproving expression but remains silent.

“Okay, so, a while back I met Will while we were both under Dr Lecter’s care. Obviously, we discussed briefly our tragedies - nothing too deep and personal, don’t worry - and eventually, after showing each other our scars, things kinda led into other things. Half of our clothes were already gone, so it wasn’t much trouble removing the rest and climbing into bed and doing the deed.”

Alana is shocked by how easily Will slept with Margot, but she grudgingly accepts this information. It’s not like she can change it, anyways.

“How does this lead into your sob story?” Alana asks softly.

Margot smirks a bit when she sees Alana's shocked and mildly hurt expression, so she scoots closer and presses her shoulder lightly against Alana's. "Are you jealous?"

Alana once would have blushed and told Margot to leave, but she's grown since then. She reveals only a small shade of rosy pink on her cheeks and instead smiles sadly. "I'm not. Will Graham was unstable - *is* unstable - and sleeping with him would have only given me more pain."

Margot nods in understanding. "Alright. I can accept that answer. But, to answer your question, there was a very specific reason as to why I slept with Will. I wanted kids. I still do. A son, specifically, so I can kill Mason and still get the money."

Alana merely stares at Margot as she bluntly admits the truth.

"Mason has complete power and control over me, and the only way I can fight back and live to tell the tale is if I get myself a son," Margot states, pouring herself more whiskey. "And so, I slept with Will and got myself pregnant. I had a plan and Will was fine with the kid and even willing to help raise it. Things were going great." She then laughs bitterly and throws her head back. Her expression suddenly dies out and she looks at Alana with a gut wrenching, pained expression. "But *Mason,* he took it all away. I don't have eggs anymore. I can't bear any children." Her voice cracks and Alana has a hard time telling whether or not it's real.

"That's why you're interested in me," Alana murmurs. "I don't stand beside your brother and I can bear children."

Margot smiles grimly. "You wanna have kids with me, Dr Bloom?"

Alana laughs. "We barely know each other, perhaps we should slow down a bit."

Margot shrugs. "Maybe. But, you know, if you're ever willing to swing my way, I won't turn you down."

“All for my womb?” Alana asks.

“You’re pretty,” Margot says, sipping whiskey. “And badass. So no, not *all* for your womb.”

Alana smirks. “I feel honored.”

Margot laughs. “You should. I find most women ugly as hell, so you’re a diamond in the rough. Hot as hell, against my brother, *and* fertile. It’s a pot of gold.”

Alana can’t help but smile at that.

~O~

“Hello?”

“Procel, it’s me, Alana.”

A breathy chuckle. “Oh good morning, Dr Bloom. It’s three AM, how can I help you?” The sarcasm is almost tangible, and Alana is having a hard time figuring out Procel. Sarcastic, proper, or something else?

Alana laughs shortly. “I apologize, but it’s an emergency.”

A snort. “Apology accepted. I was up anyways, couldn’t sleep and then decided to go for a morning walk.”

“At three AM?”

“Tell me the emergency, Alana dear.”

Alana decides that Procel is much more sarcastic and lively in the mornings.

“I found out where Hannibal is.”

There is silence for a moment, and Alana can hear a sharp intake of breath. “Have you told Jack?” She asks slowly.

“Not yet. I will, after I tell you.”

“Why?”

“Because once you know, Jack won’t say no to my idea.” His hands will be tied and Will will be safe. And it’s not even like Jack is against this plan, but she wants control for once. She wants to be the one calling the shots. Jack isn’t calling this, she is.

“Ever consider *I* might say no?” Procel mutters, and Alana isn’t sure whether or not it was meant for her.

“Please don’t,” she says anyways.

Procel laughs. “Only because you said please.”

Alana laughs as well. “Thanks.”

“So, where is our cannibal?” Procel says, the background sounds now including the beeping of what Alana assumes to be her heater or microwave.

“Florence.”

Procel hums. “That makes sense. Seems like the type of place for Hannibal to run to. How’d you figure it out?”

“I can’t say. But trust me, he’s there.”

Procel sighs but Alana can imagine her nodding. “What’s your plan?”

“Catch him,” Alana says. “Fly to Florence and take him down before he can react.”

“You’ll probably just spook him. He’ll run the moment he sees you,” Procel points out, her voice a quiet murmur, and Alana can picture her focusing on some other task like breakfast or clothes.

“He won’t see me. He won’t see any of us,” Alana says, clearing her throat.

There is silence on Procel’s end of the phone, and she can see Procel freezing and listening attentively to the phone.

“We’ll be sending you.”

Alana hears a sharp laugh followed by a breathy chuckle. “Me? You want to send in the fresh meat and use me to lure him out. Lay a trap for him. Since he’ll have no idea who I am and *obviously* fall for whatever trap I lay for him.”

She chooses to ignore the sarcasm dripping from Procel's comments. Alana is serious about this. "Yes." She won't even try to sugarcoat it. "You'll be bait."

"Bait seems too cruel a word," Procel says. "I think I'd like to be the lure. Much more romantic connotations with that word. The *lure.* It's almost sexual. But I'm not seducing Hannibal, just to be clear. Will has already done that and I'm not getting in the way of *that* whole relationship."

"Of course," Alana murmurs. "We just need you to make Hannibal feel safe in Florence and help us take him down."

"Easier said than done," Procel reminds her. "Talk to Jack about it, and we'll see if he's willing to send me all the way to Florence for just one guy who may or may not actually be in Florence."

"He's in Florence, and it's not just one guy," Alana whispers. "There's Will and Abigail, as well."

"They're not the issue, though, are they? They're just the victims who have to stay out of the way."

"I don't think they'll just stay out of the way," Alana says, remembering how Abigail pushed her out of a window and how Will looked at Hannibal with this… desire when he continued to evade the FBI. It was pride, almost.

Procel hums. "Neither do I, but that's the idea."

Alana nods, even though Procel can't see it. "When you go…" Alana whispers. "Make sure Will and Abigail stay safe."

Procel stays silent, waiting for the next words on Alana's tongue,

“Please.”

Alana can’t see it, but a thin smile stretches across Procel’s lips. “Of course. They will be blameless.”

Chapter End Notes

Thank you to everyone who is reading this! I hope this chapter wasn’t too boring. I know I found it boring because I’ve read it like a million times and there are still typos and non-well-flowing sections. Oh well. I will continue to edit.

The Street Magician

Chapter Notes

The gay is here, guys. I hope you enjoy.

Edited July 16, 2019.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

You could say they're running, but they're limping more than anything else. Steadily limping. Two of them aren't even limping, and the one who is limping is seriously injured and bleeding everywhere. They barely got out of the house and down the street before DuBois found them, but they don't know that. They just know that they're together, and that they have to get somewhere safe.

"Bedelia," Hannibal murmurs, clutching to Will tightly. "Go to Bedelia's house."

Will opens his mouth to question why the fuck they would go to Bedelia DuMaurier's house, but Abigail has a look of complete trust on her face and Will remembers the first time he met the woman.

"I believe you."

Will groans as he realizes that she probably knows the truth about Hannibal, or at least suspects it. No, he isn't realizing this, he's known this for a while, he's just remembering at the moment. *DuMaurier is our best bet, in any world.* In this world, Abigail is alive, Jack and Alana are dying, he kissed Hannibal, and now he's running away with Hannibal, just like they planned. Running away with Abigail.

As they limp along the streets and struggle to keep Hannibal conscious, Will keeps looking to Abigail in wonder. *She's alive,* he keeps thinking. *Abigail is alive.* The teacup has come together and now she's here, with him. With Hannibal. Alive in a better world.

Now, they just have to stay alive.

Somehow, they manage to steal a car and get it moving, and the heater is a blessing as it warms their soaked bodies. Will drives as Abigail tends to Hannibal in the back seat, but Hannibal will occasionally direct Will on which road to take. He knows where Beledia lives, but it's a little hard to remember everything when you've just kissed a cannibal and realized your daughter is alive. *And when you're drowning.*

They arrive at her house soon enough, and Hannibal clambers out of the car - lacking his usual grace but not his aura of… power - and stalks towards the house. He keeps a firm hand on Abigail's hand - a firm and reassuring hand, one that seems to comfort her rather than scare her - and the other on Will's. His grip is unwavering and stark, but with his fingers threaded through Will's, it feels gentle and nervous, conveying a thousand different emotions Will doesn't have the energy to decipher. The main one, however, is easy enough to understand. Protection. Hannibal is reassuring Will and guiding him through his first steps in Hannibal's world.

He can feel that hand as he drifts in the water, but he chooses to ignore it. His world of water is cruel.

Hannibal knocks twice, loudly and almost rudely, but it's understandable. Bedelia is probably sleeping at this time of night. She should be sleeping, unless she's waiting for Hannibal so arrive.

A pale light flickers on deep inside the house and within a few moments, the door creaks open and a sliver of Bedelia's face is revealed to them. Fear is etched everywhere Will can see.

"Hannibal," she whispers, her voice a little unsteady, but otherwise calm, as if she was greeting an old friend. "How may I help you?"

Hannibal's eyes bore into her and Will has the sudden urge to hold him back. Bedelia looks like cornered prey at the moment.

“We need a place to stay for the night,” Hannibal says, his voice only slightly raspy. “And then you’ll never see us again.”

Bedelia scoffs as she opens the door all the way, allowing the trio to enter. “Don’t make promises you can’t keep, Hannibal. I will be seeing you again, rather it be on the news or in the flesh.” Her voice is soft

Hannibal chuckles and lets go of Abigail’s hand, but still clutches tightly onto Will’s. “Do you have that file I gave you the other night?”

Bedelia nods slowly and begins walking towards the living room. Will suspects that ‘the other night’ was months ago. Or perhaps a file that Hannibal left on her doorstep to find when she returned. *Either way, the little detail makes this more real.* “I was under the impression that you would be collecting it during the day.”

“Change of plans,” Hannibal murmurs as he follows her into the living room, still holding onto Will.

Bedelia hums in disapproval. “How rude of you.”

“I never promised that I would collect them during the day,” Hannibal reminds her as she turns towards them with a black folder in hand.

Bedelia raises a brow at him but otherwise says nothing as she passes the folder to him. Hannibal takes it in a steady hand and keeps it at his side.

“May Abigail have her own room, for tonight? She’s someone who values privacy,” Hannibal asks, a smile on his lips. That smile holds so many lies, though, and both Will and Bedelia see them. It visibly scares Bedelia, but Will is unfazed by it. It’s natural at this point, and it’s not directed at him, this fake pleasantry. Hannibal isn’t lying to him.

Bedelia nods and looks shakily to Abigail. “This way,” she whispers as she starts walking away to another part of the house. “You know where to go, Hannibal.”

Hannibal bows slightly in thanks and shifts his gaze to Will. “Come on. Let’s get cleaned up.”

Will follows Hannibal wordlessly, his hand still linked tightly to Hannibal’s. He guides them to another part of the house upstairs, where the air is cooler and the smell of dust is slightly more prominent. They arrive at a grand but simple room with a single king sized bed and a bathroom suite.

“I hope you don’t mind sharing a bed for the night,” Hannibal murmurs to Will.

Will finds himself shaking his head.

Hannibal nods and smiles softly at Will. “Good.”

Hannibal releases Will’s hand and places the black folder on the bed before stumbling onto the chair next to the bathroom door. He shudders slightly and groans softly as he assesses the injuries he’s received, which honestly isn’t much, compared to what he can handle, but it’s still inconvenient. *The pain echoes the sting of water in his lungs.* He slowly begins undoing the buttons of his shirt, and all too soon, it’s falling off his shoulders and being folded into a half-hearted bundle and placed at the foot of the door. The rest of his clothing is peeled off steadily, one piece at a time, and not once does he look to Will, who stands there in the middle of the room, dumbfounded.

What is he supposed to do in this situation?

Once Hannibal is in only his underwear, he moves into the bathroom and begins running the bath water, the sound soothing against Will’s ears. He fiddles with some things and some others, searching for soap and towels, and all the while he doesn’t look at Will. Why won’t he look at Will? Why won’t he say something, anything, to reassure Will that he made the right decision?

“Will?”

Of course, he’d say my name.

Will looks up from the floor and meets Hannibal’s soft gaze, who now sits on the edge of the bathtub.

“Come here. You need to bathe.” Hannibal raises a hand and gestures for Will to come to him, and Will’s feet unthinkingly move towards him.

He stumbles into the bathroom in front of Hannibal, and that same desperateness he felt in the kitchen is suffocating him again. He feels almost trapped, cornered like an animal, but Hannibal’s kind and loving gaze is throwing everything off. The world is jilted, and panic slowly rises in Will. *The sounds of water fills his ears, muffling the world, the design.*

What have I done? Saved myself? Saved Abigail?

“Will?” Hannibal asks, his hands ghosting over Will’s shaking ones. “Will, talk to me.”

Will forces himself to take deep breaths, and while doing so, his suddenly finds himself in Hannibal’s embrace as he kneels on the floor in front of him. Hannibal’s arms are heavily draped over his shoulders and pressing him firmly against Hannibal’s chest, and the touch is reassuring and so familiar. Murderer or not, Will has always found comfort in the presence of Hannibal. Maybe not in the presence of the concept of Hannibal, in the shadow of the stag, but next to Hannibal’s physical form, he’s always felt safe. He once trusted Hannibal, trusted him above all others, and that feeling of trust was hard to forget.

“Are we safe?” Will murmurs against Hannibal’s shoulder.

Hannibal presses his cheek against Will’s temple. “Yes.”

Will shakes his head and gently pushes himself away from Hannibal. “Don’t lie to me.” He looks Hannibal in the eye. “Don’t you ever lie to me.”

Hannibal presses a hand against the side of Will’s face, cradling it. “We are safe, Will. We’ve escaped, and Abigail is with us, alive.”

Convince me that I am not drowning.

Will nods and shudders. “She’s alive.”

Hannibal nods with Will. “She is alive and safe, Will.” He brushes a strand of hair from Will’s eyes. “As are you.”

Will finds his eyes lingering on Hannibal’s lips for just too long, so he presses his head back against Hannibal’s shoulder and he breathes deeply. Hannibal will protect him and Abigail. Staying on Hannibal’s good side will keep him safe.

Hannibal begins undoing Will’s buttons, steady hands removing the evidence of murder and betrayal, and Will lets him.

I am the lure.

Hannibal’s hands undo the buckle of Will’s belt, and Will lets him.

I have seduced Hannibal Lecter.

Hannibal guides Will’s bare body into the warm bath water, his hands strong against Will’s sides, and Will lets him.

Now I am a part of his world, a world that is a bright, incredible playground. It's a paper doll house, and Hannibal is playing dress up. He's not some tiger prowling among the sheep. He's the grown man version of Alice in Wonderland, back for round two down the rabbit hole, and this time he knows all the tricks, and he drinks, delighted, from one half of a shattered teacup. His childhood was a nightmare and he decided to embrace it and wear it as a Cheshire smile: a smile that remains the only shining thing in the darkness. Everything he touches turns technicolor. Flowers grow from human chests. Men dream of becoming dragons. Pigs lick their lips and ask him to dinner. Death is paid for in gold coins, love is an origami heart, and God is just playing with his toys.

And now I am his lover in the midst of all of it.

"I will protect you, Will," Hannibal murmurs as he begins washing Will's hair. "You and Abigail. You will be safe under my care and we can finally start building that world we dreamed of together."

A world of mended teacups and morbid kisses.

Will looks up at the man who holds his life, in any world. "Together."

Hannibal smiles and Will's heart is warmed by it.

The bathtub is insanely large and deep, far more expensive than any tub Will's ever had the honor of sitting in, and his feet can barely touch the other end of it. An idea pops into his head, and it surprisingly doesn't scare him. "Are you going to join me?" He murmurs. *Join me in the water?*

Hannibal's hands still in Will's hair and Will can imagine his pupils dilating ever so slightly. He begins moving his hands again after a moment, his touches tender and loving.

"Would you want me to?" Hannibal asks, his voice steady.

Will turns his head slightly to meet Hannibal's eyes. "I think the bath is big enough for us both."

The corner of Hannibal's lips twitch upwards and he continues to massage Will's head. "Let me finish washing your hair. Then I might join you."

Will scoffs. "I wouldn't drown you, even if the bathtub was big enough." *Ironic.*

"I know," Hannibal says without a pause. "Not since you finally find me interesting."

Will smiles wryly. "Not since then."

Hannibal removes his hands from Will's hair and rinses them quickly in the water. He moves away from the bath and towards the sink, and after he grabs something - a sponge that probably costs far too much - he removes his underwear and moves back to the bathtub. Will scoots to one end of the bathtub and Hannibal dips his bloodied foot into the water and slinks into the tub like a swan dipping it's beak into the water. The water turns pink around Hannibal, and once he is fully seated in the water, he meets Will's steady gaze and holds it.

"Come here," Will murmurs, stretching his hand out to Hannibal.

Hannibal doesn't move at first but then reaches out with his own hand to grasp Will's. He holds Will's gaze as he moves closer, until their knees touch and Will could kiss him. In fact, that's exactly his plan.

I didn't get to kiss you in the other world, so let me kiss you in this one.

He closes the gap between them and kisses Hannibal, his lips firm against Hannibal's and offering no room to escape. His sudden movements splash water out of the tub and onto the tile floor, but neither of them can find the will to care. A soft gasp escapes Hannibal, and his

movements stutter as he tries to close the distance between their bodies. It fills Will with victory, knowing he is the only person who can do this to Hannibal Lecter. Alana didn't know the monster Hannibal is. She didn't run to this monster. This monster doesn't love her. It loves Will, in every world.

Hannibal's right hand is planted firmly on the rim of the tub, supporting him as he explores Will, and Will's own hands are planted firmly at the sides of Hannibal's face. He tries to hold him steady and kiss Hannibal's lips, but Hannibal's lips seem to be everywhere but Will's lips, instead kissing his chin, his nose, his cheeks, his jaw, and while it's sweet, it's frustrating. This is too controlled, and Hannibal still seems to have the upper hand. Is this how he kissed Alana? With the control of a devilish angel towering over her quivering body? Taking her the way Will imagined making love to her?

"Will," Hannibal murmurs against Will's lips, whispering his name just for the sake of it.

You are not making love to Alana, now, Dr Lecter. You are making love to me and only me.

Will kisses him harder and takes control of the kiss, slamming himself against Hannibal and demanding him to break under his hands. He wants to erase every memory of Alana's lips from Hannibal's mind, fill him only with thoughts of Will and his touches. Alana was a puppet and Will will not be that. He is the lure and he will make Hannibal bend over backwards for him, pledging his entire life to him. Let Hannibal forget Alana and his nights with her. Let her be safe from this monster and let Will embrace him, bearing the burden only he has the strength and insanity to bear. He represents to Hannibal every feverish dream that could come true. The dreams of love. The dreams of a family.

There is finally the beginning of a peace and quiet in their lives. A dream they can make real in this world. Hands brand him with his nightmares and dreams, and he leans into every touch Hannibal offers him. This is his monster, his creature, his killer. His lover. No one else has the honor of seeing Hannibal laid bare before them, void of deceitful words and armor of a suit and tie.

Hannibal leans away just enough to meet Will's unwavering eyes, and his eyes crinkle with a smile.

“Thank you,” Hannibal murmurs. *Thank you for running away with me. Thank you for seeing me. Thank you for loving me.*

Does Will love Hannibal? Is this what this has become? Love?

Will kisses him again, pulling Hannibal against him and dragging soft, delicate moans out of the man.

Love isn’t a choice, Will reminds himself as he presses up against Hannibal. Love isn’t some chemical that fires away in your mind. That’s lust, desire, want. He knows he desires Hannibal, the man who represents all of the sins Will never had the courage to commit, but *love?* Does he willingly commit himself to the man who could kill him without hesitation and leave his body bleeding out on the kitchen floor?

Yes.

If he wants to live, if he wants to protect Abigail, Alana, and Jack, he has to love Hannibal.

So love him he will.

~O~

After the three have bathed and tended to most of their wounds, the three meet in the living room and Hannibal sends Bedelia off to bed like a father sending his children to their rooms. The fireplace is lit and the crackling of wood and flames embraces the homey atmosphere that Will can’t help but chuckling quietly at. It makes everything seem so… normal. Just a family having a late evening meeting and cuddling by the fire.

Hannibal settles down towards the end of the longest couch in the room, and Abigail sits daintily on one side of him as Will flips down in the other side. Will’s thigh is pressing up against Hannibal’s and his eyes keep wandering to his lips. Those damn lips he has now tasted and touched and made gentle love to.

Abigail catches his look and smirks at him with a knowing smile and Will instantly is appalled by what he's doing. He's checking out Hannibal Lecter in front of his daughter, and for god's sake he's embarrassed. He tries to withhold the blush, but he's sure some of it escapes.

Hannibal has the black folder in hand, and he looks through a few papers inside before giving them to Will and Abigail.

"Your new names," Hannibal says as he hands Will and Abigail their papers. The papers are copies of passports, birth certificates, and other forms of identification. Hannibal then hands them each a small purse with passports and ID cards. "Elio and Mischa Gates."

Will looks up and watches Hannibal closely. *Mischa?* His eyes ask.

Yes, Mischa, Hannibal's gaze responds, and Will knows that he'll have to interrogate Hannibal more about that later, even if he already knows the majority of it. Mischa was his charge, his responsibility, and now Abigail is that. Abigail is his daughter now.

"Abigail," Hannibal says, turning to her ever so slightly. "You will be Will's biological daughter, and your mother died in childbirth, so you never knew her beyond Will's vague stories."

Abigail nods obediently and looks to Hannibal with her wide blue eyes, focusing on his every word.

"Will," Hannibal's eyes bore into Will with a most delicate fondness. "As Abigail's single father, you've managed fairly well in life, usually teaching psychology or biology at university. A few years ago, five to be exact, we met at an art museum, and we began seeing each other shortly afterward."

Abigail's eyes widen and a small smirk spreads on her lips as she looks at Will in victory.

Hannibal notices her reaction and smiles fondly at her. “You introduced me to Abigail and I soon became a close friend of the family. A year and a half later, I proposed and we got married in Virginia, Mischa’s birthplace.”

Abigail giggles and smiles widely at Will’s small blush. “You blushing?”

Will stares at her, mildly offended and shocked. “What? No.” He angrily rubs at his beard and Abigail’s smile only brightens.

Hannibal gives him another loving smile and while Will feels the blush retreating, something inside him warms even more. It’s all so domestic. In an attempt to change the subject, Will asks, “What’s your new name?”

“Rafael Angelo,” Hannibal answers. “I was an art professor in Paris, and I met you two when I took up a temporary job in Washington. Of course, I was smitten with Elio, so I had to peruse him.”

Will curses in his mind as the blush returns. They haven’t properly talked about… the kiss, but both of them know the shift in their relationship. For god’s sake, they made out in the bathtub. They’d be fools not to acknowledge the changes. There’s something more to it, now. Something deeper, more desperate. Something that sets Will aflame every time Hannibal touches him, but it’s all just gone unspoken, and now… Hannibal is married to him. Or, rather, Rafael is married to Elio.

“So, after a couple years in marriage, we decided to move to Italy to expand Mischa’s experience and to accept a job offer in Florence,” Hannibal says, smiling.

He really does have such a soft and beautiful smile, Will finds himself thinking. *It won’t be hard, learning to love him. A part of me already does.*

Hannibal explains some other details about their flight and travels to Florence, assuring that everything has been covered. *A thousand little details Will finds the need to list but doesn’t*

have the strength for. “We’ll stay the night here, and then we leave first thing in the morning.”

“Shouldn’t we leave sooner?” Will asks. “Jack will know you’ll try to run away.”

Hannibal smirks. “He won't catch us.”

Will laughs bitterly, thinking back to the ever growing pool of blood. Will the ambulances have taken them to a hospital by now? Will the media be beginning to sniff out this tragedy and make their damn assumptions about the bodies Hannibal left behind? Will they survive in this world? “And what if he does?” He asks anyways.

Hannibal sees the glimpse of fear and doubt in Abigail’s eyes as she watches Will, and he places a reassuring hand on Abigail’s shaking ones. “No one will catch us,” Hannibal whispers to them both, his eyes kind. “We’re safe.” *In this world.*

“But still,” Will whispers. “Do you have a plan if they do find us?”

How far will you go to protect us? Protect this world?

Hannibal’s smile falters and then slowly disappears altogether. “In the event we are discovered,” he begins slowly. “I will put all of the blame on myself and leave you two blameless.”

“How?” Will asks.

How far will you go to protect this?

Abigail’s hand tightens around Hannibal’s and she looks to him in sudden understanding.

“I will almost fatally injure you both, and then leave you to die,” he whispers, kissing the top of Abigail’s head. “And then you’ll never see me again.” The last words are a hushed whisper, barely reaching Will’s ears.

Abigail throws her arms around Hannibal and hugs him tightly, and Hannibal hugs her back, placing his cheek on the top of her head.

“You will be blameless,” Hannibal murmurs and catches Will’s gaze.

Blameless.

After a few moments, Abigail releases Hannibal and leans back, smiling sadly at him with her big blue eyes boring into Will.

“Thank you,” she whispers.

Hannibal nods and kisses her forehead. “I will do anything and everything for the two of you.”

Will wants do something, to embrace Hannibal or rest his head on his shoulder, but he can’t find the energy to. Hannibal is turned towards Abigail and he’s not just going to randomly press himself up against Hannibal. Hannibal knows the understanding Will has. There is an unspoken and quiet vow between them, finalized with Abigail’s life.

“Now,” Hannibal murmurs to Abigail. “I need to cut your hair. Nothing much, hopefully just to your chin, but it will reduce the chances of anyone recognizing you.”

Abigail leans back and nods.

“Follow me.” Hannibal stands and walks towards the kitchen, his socks padding quietly against the tile floor. Abigail follows obediently and sits on a stool as Hannibal ties a wrap

around her and grabs the scissors. A horrible image of Hannibal suddenly stabbing into Abigail's throat seizes Will, but he shoves the thought away and walks towards them. Hannibal won't hurt Abigail. Not like this, not without reason.

But he could, if he wanted to, and one day he might. It could just be a matter of time before Hannibal reopens her throat and slams that curved blade into Will's stomach.

Only a matter of time before he wakes up to a world where she is long gone.

He shudders and wraps his arms around himself. He doesn't want to die. He doesn't want to watch Abigail die. He will seduce Hannibal, no, he *has* seduced Hannibal, and as long as he stays on Hannibal's good side, everything will be okay. Hannibal will protect them. They will be safe.

Please stay safe.

~O~

Abigail goes to sleep in her private suite, and Will and Hannibal prepare for sleep in their own bedroom. After bathing and finalizing the plan, exhaustion has finally settled into Will's bones and the last drops of adrenaline leave him. He just wants to rest and prepare for the long journey ahead.

He wears only underwear and a t-shirt as he climbs into bed, and he half-heartedly scoffs at the full pajama set Hannibal dons.

"What?" Hannibal murmurs.

Will shakes his head. "I just realized that I've never seen you in your pajamas before. I have to say, I expected a robe along with those whole outfit."

Hannibal smirks as he gets into bed besides Will, the mattress dipping under his weight. “I’m surprised that you still wear the exact same outfit as you did that morning I first brought you breakfast, but at the same time I’m not.”

Will laughs softly and settles into the bed, groaning as the pillows and mattress embrace his sore muscles. “You drove how many miles to bring me a protein scramble?”

“I’m not sure,” Hannibal murmurs, turning on his side to face Will. “I never bothered counting.”

Will rolls his eyes. “That sounds like the beginning of a pickup line. And I know you’re above those.”

Hannibal nods. “Of course. I would never lower myself to the levels of such… puns.”

Will raises a brow at him. “Like you don’t make puns.”

Hannibal looks to him blankly, but Will can see the truth in his eyes and in every damn dinner he’s ever had with Hannibal.

“You make puns all of the time and they’re not even funny,” Will says. *In every reality he has to be smugly self congratulatory.*

“I have no idea what you are talking about,” Hannibal says calmly. *And in every reality he denies it.*

Will smirks. “Sure. Talkative lambs and ethical butchers. Not puns”

“Those are not puns,” Hannibal states as he shifts to lay flat on his stomach, draping an arm over his stomach. His position seems to say, “end of discussion.”

“Sure,” Will says, scooting closer to Hannibal. “I think Bedelia would call them ‘self congratulatory statements.’” She has called them that.

Hannibal turns his head to Will and sighs. He reaches an arm out to Will and grazes Will’s cheek with the back of his hand. His expression is gentle and Will smirks, knowing that Hannibal has surrendered. “We sound so domestic like this.”

Will coughs out a laugh. He just doesn’t want to talk about the puns, doesn't he? “Practically a married couple, are we?”

Hannibal’s gaze softens and his lips turn down into a little frown. “I should have asked if you were comfortable with the arrangements. I assumed-”

“It’s fine,” Will says too quickly. “You had every right to assume.” *You planned out every little detail of this, including how my feelings towards you would change. Or at least, you hoped.*

Hannibal scoots closer to Will and props himself up on one elbow so he leans slightly over Will. “I had every right to *suspect* , not assume.”

“Suspect what, Dr Lecter?” Will whispers, clicking his tongue on Hannibal’s name, tilting his chin up and keeping his eyes focused on Hannibal’s lips and eyes. The atmosphere quickly changes and Hannibal’s pupils dilate ever so slightly.

I am the lure.

Hannibal leans down and his breath washes over Will’s lips. “That what I felt for you was equally returned.”

How long has Hannibal desired Will like this? Surely not before Will was put into that damned mental institute, when the world was convinced that he was the Ripper. He was merely a puppet that Hannibal wound up and threw into the fire.

Maybe it started when Will finally saw Hannibal, saw him for the murderer and monster he is. When he stared into Hannibal's eyes and took a bite of the meat on his plate, unflinching? When he ran back to Hannibal and demanded his full attention? When he became the lure?

Will holds his gaze and flicks his eyes down to Hannibal's lips, remembering his own moments of desire for Hannibal. "And what do you feel for me?"

"Everything," Hannibal murmurs, brushing his lips over Will's. "I finally felt something other than contempt or boredom. It started with an unhealthy curiosity, and then morphed into something more profound and… almost acceptable."

Will closes his eyes and presses his mouth softly against Hannibal's lips before whispering, "Desire."

"I saw myself in you. I saw everything I wanted in you."

Will tilts his head to the side ever so slightly, and he watches Hannibal's eyes closely. Eyes that hold his steady gaze, unflinching and kind.

He bends down and kisses Will softly, merely acquainting his lips with Will's.

"Like Patroclus and Achilles," Hannibal murmurs in between the kisses.

"Took divine intervention to bring them down," Will echoes.

"Yes," Hannibal murmurs before cradling Will's face and kissing him deeply, dragging Will's spine into a seductive curve and effectively leaving Will breathless. "And it will take more

than heaven to take you away from me."

Good. Will surges up and shoves Hannibal down onto the mattress, kissing him almost harshly, their teeth clashing and tongues invading. *Make me yours.* He kisses Hannibal with a realism that he has learnt to associate with Hannibal's presence. *Only I can know you like this.*

Hannibal seems delighted by the fire Will kisses him with, and he responds equally, nipping curiously at Will's bottom lip, extracting delicate and soft moans.

This used to be a friendship, Will thinks as Hannibal's body shudders against his kisses. *The first proper friendship I thought I had. Hannibal was someone I ran to when I was scared or lonely. Someone who could handle my almost insane empathy and general horribleness, or so I thought.*

God, he loved Hannibal.

He loved the stupid little smile he had when people liked his cooking. He loved the obsessive need he had to be fashionable and polite. He loved the way Hannibal was always so prim and proper but always a bit like a shy puppy when he was in an area outside of his comfort zone. He loved the way Hannibal offered protection and companionship when he was breaking apart at the seams. He loved the way Hannibal would lean forward during their conversations, looking like he never wanted Will to stop talking. He loved Hannibal, in some philia manner.

But then Hannibal became the Ripper and suddenly everything came crashing down.

Everything was a *lie.* He felt betrayed beyond words because the one person he thought he could trust above all others, that one person threw him in prison and blamed it on *curiosity. Wind him up and watch him go.* And the fucked up part? Will understood that curiosity. Will could see himself in Hannibal and he understood why he framed Will and fucked up his life. What would happen to the little empath when he went too far and was told he was the monster he was mimicking? Would he become himself or the monster?

Or would I become the monster that molded me into this?

When Will stood behind bars and looked into the eyes of Hannibal Lecter, there was an absolute clarity about what the other was. The truth finally laid bare between them, if not between them and the rest of the world. It didn't matter how cruel and horrible that truth was, it was the truth nonetheless.

Hannibal Lecter was a monster and Will Graham understood him. The only little detail that Will refused to admit was that he also loved him.

It was almost easy, seducing Hannibal. After he learned to forgive Hannibal, he could imagine himself standing beside Hannibal over the bodies, *easily.* He could imagine those lips whispering words of adoration in his ears as he carved his knife into a body. Those lips tainted with blood as he kissed them.

For how long has Will wanted to do this? Kiss Hannibal senseless and break the man apart under his hands? Once upon a time, this was a desire for murder, a seething *hatred* that drove Will. Now, that desire to slit Hannibal's throat has become something sexual, romantic, even. He wants to watch Hannibal break apart at the seams with moans escaping his lips and lust pounding through his blood. He wants to stand above Hannibal and make him *beg* for release. He wants to kiss Hannibal softly in the morning, being the only witness to his bedhead and horrible morning breath. He wants to lean in whenever he wants and just kiss him, no questions asked.

And in this world, he could have it all.

It's so easy, too easy, arching into Hannibal's touch and kissing his soft, warm, gentle lips. He can feel Hannibal's joy radiating off him when he kisses him harder and moans softly, almost silently, against his touches. He can feel that joy reflected in himself, and it's damningly euphoric.

Hannibal tries to soften the kiss, to calm the rage boiling in Will's kisses. But Will doesn't let Hannibal soften anything, he needs this fire, this rage. He needs to brutally prove to himself that he made the right decision.

Hannibal lets him stay in control, baring his neck in submission, in such an animalistic way, and Will groans at the sight. Hannibal Lecter, pliable and submissive under his hands and lips.

"I can't wait to show you Italy," Hannibal whispers as Will kisses his jaw and down his throat. "The Norman Palace in Palermo. Florence. The Arno. Rome. Paris."

Will pauses to kiss Hannibal's lips again.

"I can't wait to live in this world with you," Hannibal murmurs lovingly. "The world I have prepared for us and have spent years dreaming off. We can have a family and live free of the FBI and of Freddie Lounds and Jack Crawford and Mason Verger and all of these horrible things."

Hannibal kisses him again. "We can be free."

Their hands are not idle as they kiss, gently exploring each other's bodies. Hannibal's right hand is caressing Will's jaw, his beard scratching his fingers. His left hand is pressed against Will's collarbone, slowly tracing the bones there and outlining a path down his sternum and seemingly memorizing every bump and curve of Will's ribs and chest. Will's own hands are clutching Hannibal's head, tilting it so Will can properly kiss him, and he moves to straddle Hannibal so he can more easily access Hannibal's lips. Everywhere they seem to touch each other is on fire, and the adrenaline that supposedly left Will's body has now returned, singing loudly in his blood as he kisses Hannibal.

Hannibal is so warm, both mentally and physically at the moment. Will used to have such a cold concept of Hannibal's mind, but the man laying underneath him seems to be everything but that. His movements are sweet and gentle, and so damn *loving.* His body is a furnace, burning Will with every touch.

Is this the real Hannibal? Are these touches and embraces real? Both in this world and the one where he drowns?

“Are you lying to me?” Will whispers against Hannibal’s lips. “You usually aren’t this passive.” *You’re never this passive. What are you plotting?*

Will’s blood suddenly runs cold, realizing that this could all be a trick, a clever plan to draw Will in. This… submission could all be a lie, and Will was falling for it again. God, he could be playing right into Hannibal’s hands, *willingly.*

Hannibal’s expression speaks confusion, but his eyes speak fear. Why fear?

“I will never lie to you, Will,” Hannibal murmurs. “Not again.”

“Is this the usual facade you put on for your lovers?” Will demands softly, his gut twisting at the thought of being just another in a string of lovers. “Is this the face you wore for Alana?” His last words are quieter than the rest, but he practically spits them in Hannibal’s face. To think that he was special, that this was different, so much deeper than what Hannibal did to Alana, god he’s a fool. This could be a lie, a lie he so desperately wants to believe.

Hannibal’s eyes turn cold.

Don’t you dare lie to me.

“This is real, Will,” Hannibal says, cradling the side of Will’s face. *Real at least in one reality. In this one.* “And I never cared for Alana. Physically, she was very attractive, but it was a tactic to survive.” He thumbs at the corner of Will’s eye. “Like I said, my compassion for you is inconvenient. I wouldn’t do all of this if I didn’t care for you.”

Will scoffs. “You threw me in jail out of *boredom* .”

“This isn’t a prison,” Hannibal whispers. “This is my life. I let you know me. *See* me. I gave you a rare gift.” He leans up and brushes his lips against Will’s lips, holding eye contact with Will. “Don’t throw it away.” There’s pain in his eyes as he murmurs the last words, as if he’s silently begging Will, *“don’t leave me.”*

“I just need to know if this is real,” Will whispers, suddenly realizing that he’s shaking against Hannibal. “I can’t… I can’t survive if this was all another game. I can’t handle any more betrayal.”

Keep me in this reality.

Hannibal surges up and holds Will in a bruising embrace. “I will never lie to you, Will,” he whispers harshly against Will’s ear. “This is real. What I feel for you is real. Abigail is real. This world is real.”

Why are there tears in Will’s eyes?

Will shudders against Hannibal and holds him tightly. *I am the lure. I have seduced Hannibal Lecter.*

I have to love Hannibal Lecter. And it’s too damn easy to do so.

Hannibal leans back enough to kiss Will again, his kisses harder this time, slamming reality into Will’s mind.

Don’t be scared of me, Hannibal seems to whisper in between the kisses. *I will protect you.*

Will kisses him back, letting everything go and giving it all to Hannibal. *I’m not scared of you. I’m scared of falling in love with a version of you that isn’t real, or, falling in love with the dark side of you.*

The wrong thing being the right thing to do was too ugly a thought, but now his morals have changed, and he has to live by Hannibal’s rules. Now he can embrace the darkness, and Hannibal will guide him through it.

The kisses die down after a few more minutes, and Will settles into Hannibal's arms, quickly dozing off in the warmth. He falls asleep with Hannibal's kiss on his head and Hannibal's arms around him.

I have seduced Hannibal Lecter.

~O~

Florence, a month later.

The sun is streaming into the apartment, turning the furniture a bright gold. Abigail is running about the place, trying to find something, and Will and Hannibal stand in their bedroom, fixing Will's disastrous tie. Will thumbs at a program for the Italian opera / concert they're about to attend at the Santa Monaca Church, and he smirks a bit at the list of music being performed.

"Clair de Lune?" Will asks. "Isn't that something everyone listens to?"

Hannibal hums in agreement as he straightens Will's tie. "But there is a reason why everyone listens to it, my dear. It has a certain gentleness and quiet power that few pianists can properly portray."

"I'm sure," Will murmurs. "Do you know the performer? Annabelle… DuBois?"

"I have heard of her, in France," Hannibal says. "But I've never listened to her perform. And I refuse to listen to anything online, it's not the same."

Will smiles. "Of course. The atmosphere is different."

Hannibal raises a brow. "The atmosphere is nonexistent when you listen to the horrible cameras attempting to capture a performer's music. The depth of their emotion is lost."

“And do you think that this *DuBois* will capture the emotion of Clair de Lune?” Will asks.

“I certainly hope so, she shouldn’t be performing if she can’t,” Hannibal mutters, releasing Will’s tie with a sigh.

Will narrows his eyes at Hannibal. “Whose sin would it be, though, if she performs poorly? DuBois or the guy who’s organizing all of this?”

Hannibal opens his mouth to respond, but Abigail effectively interrupts.

“Dad?” Abigail calls from the living room, panic lacing her voice.

“Yeah?” Will replies loudly.

Abigail bursts into the room with a small look of panic on her face. “I can’t find my purse,” she gasps.

“Have you checked the closet next to the entrance?” Will asks.

Abigail nods. “I’ve looked *everywhere* but I can’t find it! I had it ten minutes ago!”

Hannibal gives Will’s tie one last unforgiving glance and turns to Abigail. “Did you leave it in the bathroom?”

Abigail opens her mouth to say no, but then her eyes widen and she mutters a curse as she runs out of the room. A few moments later she yells, “Thank you, Rafi!”

Hannibal smiles and Will rolls his eyes.

“It’s still so strange to call you that,” Will murmurs. “That’s not your name.”

Hannibal shrugs and kisses Will lightly on the lips. “It’s who I am, here.”

Will shakes your head. “You’re Hannibal, here. The real Hannibal.”

Hannibal smiles and Will kisses him again, always finding himself excuses to kiss Hannibal.

“The rest of the world can’t know that, Will dear,” Hannibal whispers. “Only you and Abigail can.”

Will nods. “I know.”

As they enter the living room, looking almost perfectly dressed, Abigail yells out a victorious ‘ha!’ from where Will assumes to be the bathroom, and she runs back into the living room with a smirk on her face and her purse in hand. “Found it!”

Will smiles at her.

“Excellent,” Hannibal says, clapping his hands together. “Shall we, then?”

Will nods, grabbing his coat off of the back of the couch and shrugging it on. “Ready.”

Hannibal smiles widely and offers Abigail his arm, which she happily takes, a proud smirk on her face. Will rolls his eyes at the pair and follows them out, locking the door quietly behind them. They exit the building quietly talking about the differences between a harpsichord and a piano, and they smile in greeting at their neighbors and tourists strolling about the street.

The sunlight nearly blinds Will as he steps out, and he has to stop for a moment and cover his eyes.

Hannibal, as perfect as he is, doesn't stop moving, and he starts walking down the street towards the theatre, Abigail happily chatting at his side. Will pauses, when he regains his sight, to look at them walking down the street, smiling and happy as they go to an Italian opera. The sunlight makes Abigail's eyes almost glow green, and Will feels something twist in chest.

This is beautiful.

"Elio!" Hannibal calls, realizing that Will has frozen, staring at their figures.

"Sorry," Will mutters, rushing forward to catch them. "Got lost in thought."

Abigail raises a brow at him. "Thought? Or were you admiring Rafi's hair in the sunlight?"

It was your eyes in the sunlight, Will thinks, almost bitterly. "Not everything in my mind is about Rafi, Mischa."

She smirks and starts walking again. "Whatever you say, Dad."

Will is never going to get tired of her calling him Dad.

Originally, they planned to take a taxi to the Santa Monaca, but after realizing how close it is, Hannibal insisted on the scenic stroll to the church. They have to cross the Arno to get there, and Hannibal always loves doing that. When they're halfway across the bridge, Abigail releases Hannibal's hand to grab something from her purse - her phone to take pictures with Hannibal and Will - and Hannibal's hand easily slips into Will's. He smiles softly at Will, his smile more of a smirk than anything else, and they continue their walk in comfortable silence, occasionally responding to one of Abigail's remarks about opera or the piano or Italian.

Little details in my design.

They arrive at the cozy little church five minutes before the start of the performance - Hannibal is clearly satisfied with their timing - and they greet the other members of the audience with kind smiles as they walk in. They haven't been in Florence long enough to know any of the other people in the church - most of them are tourists, anyways - and they each grab a program before taking their seats. Will seats between Hannibal and Abigail, and he momentarily wonders if he should switch with one of them, because Abigail will appreciate Hannibal's small comments much more than he will.

Abigail opens the program and reads it attentively, quietly murmuring the Italian words, and Will leans over her shoulder to read it as well. She gives him a little glare, knowing that he has his own program, but she allows him to read it with her.

- *Mozart, Wolfgang Amadeus*

Arias and Duets, from 'The Mariage of Figaro', K. 492

- *Puccini, Giacomo*

Tosca > Arias from "Tosca"

- *Puccini, Giacomo*

La Bohème > Arias from: "La Bohème"

- *Rossini, Gioachino*

The Barber of Seville (Rossini) > Arias from 'Il barbiere di Siviglia'

- *Puccini, Giacomo*

Madame Butterfly > Arias from Madame Butterfly

- *Verdi, Giuseppe*

La Traviata > Arias from La Traviata

- *Debussy, Claude*

Clair de Lune

“Looks like Ms DuBois is last,” Hannibal murmurs to Will.

Little details.

Will hums. “Let’s hope she satisfies your musical tastes.”

Hannibal smirks, his eyes lingering on Will’s lips.

“Don’t be gross in public, Dad,” Abigail mutters, poking at Will’s side.

He scoffs at her and she rolls her eyes. “I’m not being gross.”

“You’re giving Rafi bedroom eyes and I’m about to vomit,” she mutters lowly, and Hannibal doesn’t hear her. Will is eternally grateful Hannibal doesn’t hear, and Abigail should be as well, because he’ll only ramp up the pubic affection in response. The man is hopeless, at times.

“Don’t talk about my bedroom life,” Will shoots back. “And he’s the one giving me looks, not the other way around.”

She shrugs. “You’re returning them, though.”

Will has to fight the urge to roll his eyes like a teenager. He settles for a sigh. “Don’t talk about my bedroom life.”

“Or lack thereof,” Abigail mutters mostly to herself.

“Mischa!” Will hisses. “You know what, end of discussion.”

She giggles and doesn’t even try to hide her wide grin. “You’re blushing.”

Will gives her a clear ‘I’m ignoring you’ look and turns towards Hannibal. “So, anything interesting to say?”

Hannibal gives Will and inquisitive look. “Why? Is Mischa bullying you again?”

Will huffs out a disbelieving sigh. “Both of you are awful.”

“What have I done?” Hannibal asks, mildly offended. “I merely asked if she’s bullying you.”

“You made me sound pathetic,” Will mutters, crossing his arms and pouting like a child.

Hannibal does his equivalent of an eyeroll, a sigh and a single eyebrow raised. “You are not a child.”

Will gives him a burning gaze - burning with playful and thinly covered sexual hints - and shrugs. “I know.”

Hannibal is about to say something in response, something that would probably make Abigail laugh and tease Will some more, but a man is stepping forward and introducing the music, the Italian booming clearly across the room.

Hannibal instantly sits up straight and gives the ‘stage’ his full attention, and Will chuckles at the way he looks like an excited child on Christmas. Abigail smiles excitedly at Will, and she grins widely at Hannibal who turns to meet her gaze for a moment.

The music flows from the voices of the singers and the piano, and Will finds himself honestly enjoying it. The music seems to flow into his bones, and he feels relaxed and content. The singers are *impressive* , and Will finds himself mouthing ‘wow’ every once in a while when they hit a particularly high note, their voices clearly ringing through the small church, proudly displaying their skills. Hannibal looks like he’s about to cry - in his own subtle way - and Will gives his hand a squeeze, and Hannibal gives him a small smile.

The last song comes round all too soon, and soon enough a golden haired women steps forward. She had performed in a duet, previously, but Will finally has a name to her face. Annabelle DuBois. She’s got pale golden hair and thin lips, and her eyes are slightly sunken into her skull, giving her a strange look. She doesn’t look deathly, though, quite the opposite, she looks full of life and her smile is kind. His eyes spot small believes on her cheeks and ears, and he commits them to memory.

Little details.

“She’s so pretty,” Abigail murmurs besides Will.

Will finds himself nodding in agreement, and he casts a glance over to Hannibal to see his reaction. Hannibal's eyes are glued to her, his eyes unblinking and his lips parted ever so slightly. Will narrows his eyes in concern and gives Hannibal's hand another squeeze.

"Rafi?" Will murmurs, leaning towards Hannibal. "You okay?"

Hannibal seems to snap out of a trance, and he turns to Will with a small smile. "Of course. She just reminded me of someone, that's all."

Will nods but gives Hannibal *the look,* demanding that Hannibal explain later. Hannibal's eyes surrender and he nods gently. *Good.*

DuBois takes her seat at the piano and positions her hands over the piano, and she closes her eyes and breathes deeply. The breath is released and her hands seem to sink into the piano, along with the rest of her body, and she begins playing.

It starts as a whisper: a murmur to the crowd, imparting some sweet secret to the crowd. The music is soft, oh so soft, but every note is clear. It reminds Will of bells, crystal notes floating through the air. The tune seems so sweet, like a mother's lullaby, and Will closes his eyes for a moment, relishing in the music. It's truly beautiful. He allows himself to delve into her mind, into the piece of her soul DuBois has revealed to the crowd, and he smiles slightly. Everything is in control, in her music. It is expressive and unbound by metre and measure, rising and falling as she pleases, but it does not stutter. Every sound is meant to be, every note is clear and determined, and the piano serves her as she coaxes sweet music from it's strings. It reminds him of Hannibal, expressive and freewilled, but controlled. Everything is within her grasp.

The music builds as she plays, builds and builds and builds until it reaches some glorious climax - a roaring of sounds and *soul* - but then it falls. It falls slowly, softly, as if time was momentarily frozen and someone was carefully observing every frame of it. The music falls deeper and quicker, and *god,* Will can hear her soul in the music, a sorrowful song to some lost soul.

He turns his head to Hannibal, and he's a bit shocked by what he sees.

Hannibal is crying, stoically so, but crying nonetheless. A single tear falls down his cheek and he makes no move to wipe it away. *The piano has the texture of a memory. Of a dream. An echo - no matter how hopeless - of reality.*

Will wants to whisper a comforting phrase, but he can't bear to tear Hannibal away from the music. He just silently prays that Hannibal is crying because of the music's beauty rather than because it has failed his expectations. He would rather keep Annabelle DuBois off his dinner table.

She finishes the song with a clear denouement, and rises from the piano as the crowds rises with her, their hands coming together in glorious applause.

Hopefully she has met Hannibal's expectations.

There are some drinks being served after the performances, but everyone runs to the front of the church to congratulate the performers, ignoring the wine. A few linger back, picking from the small selection of wine, and the Angelos are included in that group.

"Shouldn't we go congratulate them?" Abigail asks Hannibal, watching DuBois shake hands with an elderly Italian couple.

Hannibal takes a sip of his wine. "Let them receive their praises from the masses, and then we can congratulate them once things have settled down. I want to have a proper conversation with them, not just run there and gush quickly about their music."

Abigail sighs but nods. "I really want to talk to the last lady."

"Annabelle DuBois," Will murmurs. "Her music was lovely."

Hannibal chuckles. "It was far more than lovely, Elio dear. I could hear her soul in the music, and I felt a bit of my soul sing with her."

Will smiles, releasing a small sigh he didn't realize he was holding. "I'm glad she has met your expectations."

"She has surpassed them, beautifully so," Hannibal says, watching Will carefully before turning his gaze to Abigail. "This has finalized my decision, however."

"Oh?" Will asks, turning to Abigail who has a fearful look on her face.

"We're purchasing a piano, not a harpsichord," Hannibal declares, and Abigail grins widely and hugs Hannibal quickly, careful not to spill his wine.

"Thank you thank you!" She whispers happily, and Hannibal kisses the top of her head.

"Of course," he says. "I would one day love to hear your soul in your music." *Hear your soul as we see it every day.*

Abigail smiles. "One day. Probably a day quite far off from now."

Hannibal scoffs but looks to her fondly. "Nonsense. You'll learn quickly, and you'll have an excellent teacher to guide you."

"Narcissist," Will mutters.

Hannibal can only smile playfully.

~O~

Annabelle wanders through the crowd, a glass of red wine in her hand. Her head pivots about, looking for a head of gold, but her eyes find nothing. *Dammit, where did he go?*

She here's a clear voice call, "Signora DuBois!" so she quickly turns, but while doing so, she slams into someone and she can feel a bit of wine slosh out of her cup.

Fuck.

"Oh!" A woman exclaims, and Annabelle instantly panics.

"I am so sorry!" She says urgently, frantically searching for the stain of wine she is sure is on the woman.

Bright blue eyes meet hers, and they are kind and forgiving. "No no, it's okay!" The woman, the *girl,* says, and she dabs gently at a dark stain on her shoulder. "I should be more careful about where I'm going."

She speaks English, Annabelle notes. "Nonsense. I was the one who ran into you. I apologize profusely."

The girl laughs shortly. "It's okay. Really. You can barely see the stain, and it's not big."

Annabelle cringes at the stain her careful eyes can easily pick out. "I still stained your lovely dress with red wine," she says, dabbing the stain with her handkerchief in hand.

The girl smiles. "Accidents happen." Her smile pulls at a memory in Annabelle's mind, and she suddenly recognizes the girl.

"Usually they aren't this expensive," Annabelle murmurs. *Abigail Hobbs.*

Abigail shrugs. “Nothing we can do about it now. I’m Mischa,” she says, sticking her hand out. So American.

“Annabelle,” she says, shaking *Mischa’s* hand. “Annabelle DuBois.”

“Your music was lovely,” Mischa says, smiling brightly, her eyes crinkling in an endearing manner and framing her blue eyes lovingly. “I think my stepdad was crying during your song.”

Annabelle flushes pink. “I hope they were tears of joy and not disappointment.”

Mischa laughs. “Don’t worry. I think he’s imprinted on your music, he’ll be gushing about it for *weeks.* ”

Annabelle smiles. “While I feel sorry for you, I cannot lie about the immense pride I feel.”

Mischa sighs. “That’s good. Take pride in your work, you deserve it.”

“Thank you, you’re too kind,” Annabelle murmurs. “I assume your father has not abandoned you here alone? Is he congratulating another performer?”

Mischa nods. “Yeah. He and Dad are talking to the big shot opera singer right now, but I’m sure my dad will come breathing down my neck soon enough, asking if any creepy guys have tried to get my number.”

Annabelle laughs. “So he’s the protective type?” *He and Dad?*

Abigail nods. “Very much so. But I’m kinda used to it, since both of my dads are like that twenty four seven.”

So Hannibal and Graham are faking a relationship? "Well, there is nothing wrong with wanting to protect your family."

Mischa nods. "Family is all you have, in the end, and I know I'd do anything for my dads."

Annabelle smiles. *I'm sure you would.* "They sound lovely."

Abigail smiles proudly. "They are."

"Mischa!" Another voice says, and soon Hannibal Lecter is placing his hand on Mischa's shoulder and smiling brightly at Annabelle.

Dear God, he's here.

"Looks like you beat us to the lovely Signora DuBois!" Hannibal says, extending his hand to Annabelle. "I'm Mischa's stepfather, Rafael Angelo."

Annabelle shakes his hand, noting how warm his hands are and how firm his grip is. She utters a silent *fuck* in her mind, cursing her shaking hand.

"Annabelle DuBois, but you already knew that," she says, smiling at him.

"Your music was lovely, Signora DuBois," Hannibal says, bowing his head slightly. "It gripped my soul and demanded to be carved into my heart."

Annabelle chuckles at his dramatics. "Are you a poet, Signor Angelo?"

Hannibal smirks proudly. "Not by profession, but I am an art professor, so I dabble here and there in poetry."

“Fancy,” Annabelle murmurs. “You sound so professional compared to my street music.”

“Street music?” Hannibal exclaims. “That was hardly street music, Signora.”

Annabelle smirks. “Thank you, but I am a simple pianist trying to make my way through the world, with a small psychology degree tucked under my belt. My music, while it may have the power to touch hearts and souls, is street music. I am merely a street… *magician* ,” Annabelle whispers. “A common but magical creature dedicated to the simpler aspects of illusion.”

Hannibal smiles at her words, and he makes no move to argue against them.

“Mischa,” yet another voice says, and a dark haired man steps next to Mischa, his eyes worrisome.

“Hello,” Annabelle says, smiling playfully at Will Graham.

Will’s eyes widen and he smiles a small, shy smile at her as he extends his hand. “Ms DuBois.”

“I assume you are Mischa’s other father?” Annabelle says.

Will chuckles and nods. “Elio. Mischa’s biological father.”

“Lovely to meet you, *Elio,* ” Annabelle says.

Hannibal smiles at *Elio* fondly, while Elio seems blissfully unaware of the loving gaze as he speaks. “You’re music was breathtaking, Ms DuBois. I am not one for concerts and operas, but after this performance, I am most certainly rethinking that position.”

Annabelle grins. “I’m glad to hear it.”

“So, Mischa,” Hannibal asks. “How did you stumble across la Signora?”

Annabelle ducks her head. “I am afraid that was my fault, I wasn’t watching where I was going and I ran into your daughter, effectively spilling my wine on her dress.” It takes her a moment to realize that Hannibal wasn’t asking her, but she quickly removes the thought. Even if he wasn’t, she still needs to defend Abigail. Or *Mischa.*

“It’s fine,” Mischa quickly says.

Hannibal raises a brow. “Where is the stain?”

Mischa tries to hide it but Annabelle points it out quickly with two fingers. “There.”

Hannibal inspects the stain closely and hums. “There could have been a significantly greater amount of damage done, however the stain is barely noticeable. I’m glad your will to wear dark clothes overcame my pleads for a lighter colored dress, Mischa.”

Mischa giggles. “See? Black is excellent.”

“All is forgiven, Signora,” Hannibal murmurs, bowing his head.

Annabelle shakes her head. “I still owe you, or at least, Mischa something.”

Hannibal pouts his lips ever so slightly, thinking, and then a bright grin slides onto his face. “Join us for dinner, one evening. I assume you’re staying in Florence for a little while longer.”

Annabelle puts a hand to her chest. “Dinner already? I barely know you, you and your family could be a family of psychopathic murderers.”

Annabelle can feel Graham stare into the side of her head, aimed for her temple.

“Please, I insist,” Hannibal says. “Mischa was quite taken by your music, and like you said, you owe us. I will not pass up the opportunity to dine with such a skilled pianist such as yourself.”

Annabelle blushes. “Well, I certainly hope you can cook well.”

“The kitchen owns half his soul,” Graham mutters. “You’ll be in for a treat, trust me.”

Well don’t you just sound like the grumpy husband?

Mischa nods enthusiastically. “It’d be really really nice.”

Annabelle smiles. “Well, here’s my phone number,” she says as she pulls out a small notebook out of her purse, scribbling some numbers down before neatly ripping the page out. “And text me the time and date. I’m in Florence until further notice.”

Hannibal smiles widely. “I look forward to having you for dinner.”

Again, Annabelle softly adds.

The four stand around and chat a little more about wine and music, and Annabelle begins realizing the true nature behind Graham and her brother. They aren’t faking a relationship, they’re genuinely in one, and Graham seems… happy and willing to stand beside Hannibal.

This wasn't a kidnapping done on Hannibal's part, this was… persuasion. They eloped together, bringing their surrogate daughter with them to Florence.

And Hannibal seems too happy every time he looks at Graham. His eyes crinkle and his little crooked teeth are revealed behind his lips, and Graham is so often unaware of the way Hannibal dotes on him.

Annabelle smiles to herself as she watches the family leave the church, Graham and Mischa bickering quietly about god knows what.

You learned how to love again, Hannibal. I'm happy for you.

~O~

They arrive back at home after ice cream - Abigail insisted and no way in hell was Will saying no to Italian ice cream - and Abigail flops down onto the couch, groaning softly.

"Why did I wear high heels," she moans. "My feet are *killing* me."

"Fashion has a price," Hannibal murmurs, and Will scoffs.

"You sold your soul for fashion," Will says, and Abigail laughs loudly.

"He probably did," she says, taking off her shoes and sliding them neatly into the shoe rack.

"Bold of you to assume that it was fashion I sold my soul for," Hannibal says, taking off his jacket and shoes, putting them away neatly. "I would argue I sold it for my cooking."

Will hums in agreement. “And your soul is kicked away in the kitchen, which is why you’re so damn possessive of it.”

“I have every right to possessive of my kitchen,” Hannibal says plainly.

Abigail shrugs. “He does.”

Will raises a brow at her. “Don’t side with him again. I’m the one who is actually your father.”

“Which is why I rebel,” she says happy, leaning back against the couch. She groans loudly before Will can say anything, and then suddenly stands up. “I’m gonna go shower and then sleep, I’m exhausted.”

Hannibal nods, stepping forward and kissing the top of her head. “Goodnight, Mischa.”

“Goodnight, Rafi,” she murmurs, giving him a quick hug. She moves towards Will and embraces him tightly, burying her face in his shoulder. “Goodnight, Dad.”

“Goodnight, sweetheart,” Will murmurs against her hair, which now barely reaches her shoulders. “Sweet dreams.”

Abigail smiles gently and pads off to her room, humming Clair de Lune under her breath.

“I’m never going to get tired of hearing her call me Dad,” Will says. “It feels so natural and… satisfying. I feel proud, as if I’ve done a good job raising her.”

Hannibal hums in agreement and kisses Will’s left temple. “You should be proud, she is an amazing girl.”

Will nods and tilts his head back to he can chastely kiss Hannibal on the lips. “I’m going to take a bath. Join me?”

Will smirks at the way Hannibal’s eyes dilate.

“Of course.”

-

The water is soothing against their bodies, and Will closes his eyes and leans his head back, letting it fall against Hannibal’s collarbone. He’s sitting in their fancy ass tub in between Hannibal’s legs, his back pressed up against Hannibal’s chest. Hannibal’s hands are pressed up against Will’s chest, and they’re not even washing themselves, they’re just sitting there, relaxing and delighting in each other’s presence.

The water is real, and he can feel Hannibal around him.

“DuBois was beautiful tonight,” Will murmurs, turning his head so his lips near Hannibal’s collarbone.

“She was,” Hannibal replies, his lips moving against Will’s forehead.

“You said she reminded you of someone,” Will says. “Who did she remind you of?”

Hannibal seems to grow stiff under Will, and Will shifts in Hannibal’s embrace so he can properly look at the man. “Hannibal?”

Hannibal shakes his head gently and presses his forehead to Will’s. “No one of importance.”

Will scoffs. “I don’t believe you.”

“It doesn’t matter anymore,” Hannibal whispers. “She’s long dead.”

“The dead can haunt us,” Will reminds him. “And I want to know.”

Hannibal sighs and kisses him chastely. “If you must know, she reminded me of my sister.”

“Mischa?” Will asks. “Because of how she moved or looked?”

“Looked,” Hannibal whispers. “Annabelle has a limp, and my sister was full of life.”

“Movement is more than just walking,” Will says.

“Yes, but everything I remember about her is how she ran through the fields and corridors. And her smile,” Hannibal whispers, smiling at some memory playing in his head. “But Annabelle was nothing more than a hopeful reflection of what I lost.”

Will relaxes under Hannibal’s embrace again, settling against his chest. “Thank you,” Will says. “For telling me.”

“Of course,” Hannibal whispers. “You deserve to know.”

Never lie to me, Hannibal. I have learnt to love you and I cannot survive being heartbroken a second time.

Chapter End Notes

Uuugghhhhhh I have read and reread and rereread this chapter so many times. It took me a while to get inside Will's head, and I'm still not totally satisfied with how I've presented his thoughts. Hopefully it's enough to satisfy you guys.

But the gay is here and I was so happy while writing the Florence scenes, my heart is bursting. Why can't they just be happy? Is that too much to ask?

Next chapter is honestly on its way. Slowly slowly being written. But I keep feeling uninspired and unsatisfied with how I'm writing Hannibal and Will's relationship, so bear with me. It's getting there. A few more scenes and then editing and then publishing.

A Fallen Angel

Chapter Summary

Happy times in Florence.
Murder times in Florence.
Sexy times in Florence.

The author has very few regrets and no self control.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Seven weeks earlier.

"Who are you?"

"Don't you recognize me?"

The dark haired woman shakes her head. "I do. But you're not the woman I recognise. You are an imposter."

Imposter. Now that's a rather accusing term.

Procel smiles halfheartedly, sighing. She should have known Chiyoh would be hard to convince. "I'm not."

Chiyoh shakes her head. "Mischa Lecter is dead. You are not her."

Procel steps forward slowly and raises her hands when Chiyoh points her gun at her. "I can prove it," she whispers, trying to dangle her identity over Chiyoh like a cat's toy.

Chiyoh scoffs. “I’d like to see you try.”

Procel only smiles slightly as she walks close enough to the gun. She could reach out and snatch the gun out of Chiyoh’s grasp, if she was quick enough. But Chiyoh would fire and nothing good would come out of it. She’d be labeled and enemy and she doesn’t want that.

“May I?” She asks, grabbing the collar of her jacket and pulling the zipper down slightly. Her words can be twisted and deceitful. The scars on her body cannot.

Chiyoh narrows her eyes, but slowly nods. “You may. If you want to deal with the cold and snow.”

Procel nods in thanks. “I think I can handle a bit of cold.” *Especially after what I’ve lived through.*

She unzips her jacket, takes off her scarf and unbuckles her belt, and she places them neatly on the ground, before dragging off her shirt and placing it with the rest of her things. Her blond hair is loose around her head, and it billows out around her shoulders, protecting her from the cold, if only a little. Her jeans come off, and it’s a bit trickier than the rest, but worth it when she sees Chiyoh’s eyes narrow and her body freeze. A prosthetic leg tends to get people’s attention.

She’s standing in front of Chiyoh, completely naked ignoring her underwear, bra and boots.

“You think someone would fake a prosthetic leg just to fool you?” She asks.

Chiyoh doesn’t smile. “I’ve seen people do more for less,” she whispers. God knows she’s right.

Procel watches her carefully. “You’ve seen people die in the name of pleasure,” she states.

Chiyoh's finger twitches against the trigger. "I saw *you* die in the name of pleasure."

"A part of me did," Procel whispers. "My leg most certainly did."

"You are not Mischa Lecter," Chiyoh whispers, angrily so.

Procel narrows her eyes. "What makes you so sure?"

"You are *alive,* for one. Mischa is dead. She died and Hannibal ate her."

"How could I prove my identity?" Procel asks. "You think these scars could lie?" She turns to reveal her side, where a nasty pale line stretches across her ribs and stomach. Her thighs are covered in long, deep scars and damaged skin, ripped away from her.

Chiyoh shakes her head. "You can't prove to be what you are not."

Procel sighs and chews at her bottom lip. "Hannibal hated spinach was he was a child," she begins. "Never knew why. His nickname for me was 'pidgeon,' since I was so carefree." She chuckles at a memory. "Our nanny's name was Svajone. Monster of a woman. She'd take away my toys when I disobeyed. Hannibal always stole them from her, though, and give them back to me. He also kept gardens to attract fireflies, and they'd eat the snails he kept there. A bit barbaric but a little bit of death never bothered a Lecter."

Chiyoh watches her carefully, never moving and keeping her gun trained on Procel.

"He taught you how to hunt, and you showed me how to pluck birds," Procel continues. "I favored my left foot but my right hand, and I had an infatuation with our dog's hair. Hannibal loved thunderstorms but I hated them. At night I'd sneak into his bed, demanding bedtime stories. He told me that thunder was an angel's shout, and they were protecting us from the enemy. He'd always allude to the fact that God was the enemy."

Procel is shivering by now, but she takes another step towards Chiyoh, proud of the way Chiyoh has frozen. You cannot prove to be what you are not, but Procel is what she claims to be.

"Could an imposter tell you all of that?" Mischa whispers, grasping the barrel of Chiyoh's rifle with a steady hand. "Could I make all of that up?"

"No," Chiyoh whispers, her voice not betraying any emotion she feels. "No, you could not."

Mischa smiles. "Now, do you want to inspect my scars more closely or can I put my clothes back on?"

Chiyoh lowers her gun and uncocks it. "I don't need to. I've heard enough." Her voice is steady and almost nonchalant, but Mischa knows better.

She laughs shortly, quickly pulling her clothes back on. "I should have just confessed those details from the beginning."

"Probably," Chiyoh says. "You could have gotten yourself sick for nothing." Her voice is almost distant and her eyes don't meet Mischa's.

Mischa chuckles as she pulls on her shirt. "Not nothing."

"Why are you here?" Chiyoh asks, her voice soft. "Why now, after so long?" There is a silent accusation in her tone, demanding to know why Mischa has left her here with the fireflies.

Mischa smiles wryly. "I was looking for Hannibal. I've been looking, spent years of my life looking for *Il Mostro* and the Chesapeake Ripper and the Copycat Killer and finally, Hannibal the Cannibal. And now I've found him, hiding away in the US, teetering on the edge of safety. He's about to fall, and I'm going to be there when he does."

“Why come find me, then?” Chiyoh whispers, handing Mischa her scarf. *Why find me after abandoning me for so long?*

“What? I can’t come say hi to an old friend?” She asks.

“You’re dead,” Chiyoh says quietly. “I thought you were dead. I watched you die.”

Mischa nods. “I know. But… I need your help. I’ve found Hannibal and I need to take precautions. He’s a killer, and he’s made friends with killers.”

“Hannibal doesn’t make friends,” Chiyoh whispers. “He makes allies.”

Mischa smirks. “Doesn’t matter what these people are to him. They’ll defend him until the end, and I don’t want to end up in the wrong end of their knives.”

“You want me to be your bodyguard,” Chiyoh states.

“I don’t want to die before I can properly explain myself to Hannibal,” Mischa says.

Chiyoh nods and begins walking towards the castle, her gun slung over her shoulder and her hands in her pockets. “What makes you think I’ll go with you?”

“You promised to protect Hannibal and I,” Mischa reminds her, walking next to her. “You have a second chance at protecting me.”

“Are you blaming me for your supposed death?” Chiyoh asks almost casually. Mischa hears the accusation laced in between the words.

“I’m not. But you do.”

Chiyoh’s lips form a thin line and Mischa knows she’s won.

“Don’t let me die all over again, Chiyoh.”

Chiyoh bites at her lip and walks at a faster pace, her eyes set and angry.

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Present day

There’s a gentle knock on the door, and Mischa springs up from the couch to open it. She peers through the peephole in the door, grinning when she sees Annabelle there, a bottle of wine in hand.

She opens the door and smiles widely. “Hi!”

Annabelle gives her a pleasant smile and kisses her cheeks as she enters the house. “Hello, Mischa! How are you this evening?”

Mischa shrugs. “Normal, I guess. Nothing too special, besides Dad and Rafi panicking over food.”

Annabelle ducks her head in a bit of shame. “I certainly hoped I haven’t caused too much stress concerning the dinner.” Annabelle says softly, walking into the living room with Mischa. The Angelo home is very bright, filled with yellows and reds, and it must look stunning in the daylight, not that it didn’t look stunning now. A deep brown carpet covers the center of the room, and there are paintings of the ocean around the room, along with a copy of Starry Night.

Mischa waves the issue away nonchalantly. “They always argue over food. It’s practically tradition.”

“Over how to prepare it or where the food comes from?” She asks, wondering what type of meat she’ll be fed this evening.

Annabelle sees a glimpse of fear, or rather nervousness, flash across Mischa’s expression, but it’s gone a moment later.

“Mostly how to prepare it. Rafi usually chooses witch butchers to shop from and stuff,” Mischa says, shrugging again. “Come on. They’re waiting in the kitchen, Rafi’s pride and joy.”

They pad into the kitchen, a wide and open space with a small island in the middle, and almost every surface is occupied with something. Pans of pasta and small dishes of sauces fill the island, and cutting boards and boiling pots of soup and god knows what cover everything else. Hannibal is skillfully cutting the vegetables, basil, Annabelle notes, and Elio stands next to him with a disbelieving expression.

Elio opens his mouth to snap at Hannibal, a playful smirk on his lips, but he snaps his mouth shut the moment he sees Annabelle.

“Annabelle,” he says, and Hannibal turns his head to meet her eyes.

“Hello, Annabelle. How was your journey here? I know you live a quite a ways from here,” Hannibal says, a friendly smile plastered on. His voice is even, and everyone in the room knows who is in control.

Well, everyone but Elio seems to know who is in control. Perhaps he does know Hannibal’s power, but believes he can match him in wit or escape the consequences of defying Hannibal. A foolish idea, really. A suicide mission that Annabelle has thrown herself into.

“It was a bit hard to find your place, but fortunately my driver knows Florence very well,” Annabelle says, and she stares at Hannibal dead in the eye. Almost challenging him. Believing, like Elio, that she can survive Hannibal Lecter.

“Do you want me to take your coat?” Mischa says, effectively forcing Annabelle to break eye contact. She didn’t back down. “Sorry, I should have offered earlier.”

“That would be lovely, thank you,” Annabelle murmurs, shrugging out of her maroon coat and handing it to Mischa.

She glances over to Elio and notices that he refuses to meet her eyes for anything longer than a moment. When Mischa returns, suggesting that Annabelle taste the sauces, Elio doesn't try to meet Mischa eyes when she looks to him.

Not fond of eye contact, are you?

Hannibal laughs at Mischa, saying that he can’t possibly spoil the sauces before the dinner properly begins, and then he’s looking to Elio with that damningly fond expression.

And Elio meets his gaze head on, holding it and challenging it.

“Would you like some wine, Annabelle?” Hannibal asks, pulling out a couple wine glasses and breaking away from Elio’s stare. He gestures to the bottle of wine in her hand“If I remember, you preferred darker wines, at least at the concert.”

Annabelle nods and blushes. “I’m sorry, I should probably hand this to you. It is a gift, afterall.”

Hannibal takes the bottle with a smile.

“I do prefer darker wines, red wine, but I’m not as much as a wine connoisseur as the average Italian is. So forgive me if this wine doesn’t meet the standards I know you have.”

Hannibal smiles and reads out the label of the bottle. “This is perfect, Annabelle. And, since you bought this bottle, I know very well that you will enjoy it. No need for me to guess which wines you would enjoy.”

“I’m sure your guesses would be very accurate,” Annabelle says. “You are very attentive to the details, Signor Angelo.”

“The Devil is in the details,” Hannibal says, turning back to the stove.

“Indeed he is,” Annabelle murmurs. “The Devil’s design is in the details, the small, seemingly inconsequential details that destroy an entire faith.”

“And drag you into another,” Elio says, glancing at Annabelle’s eyes before flickering down to her lips and jaw.

“The faith of the devil?” Annabelle asks.

“The faith of the devil,” Elio confirms.

Mischa watches them with her lips slightly parted, her eyes wide as she takes in their words. If she had been any other child, Annabelle would be worried about whether or not she understood the conversation. But Mischa is a daughter of a monster; she knows the details the devil gives.

Hannibal serves dinner, and Annabelle does what little she can to help - which is mostly carrying dishes to the dinner table and pouring the wine. Mischa rambles about the dishes, explaining their brief history and the meanings behind the complex little designs Hannibal has sown into the food. Hannibal looks to her in pride, and Elio does as well. She is their creation, their beautiful little detail that changes faith.

But whose faith?

Annabelle can feel the tension in the room when they all bite into the meat, and she watches relief flood through Mischa's body when she tastes it. Annabelle takes a small bite of the veal quickly after Mischa, and a beautiful taste bursts on her tongue.

"Signor Angelo, this is divine," she whispers, savoring the taste. "You should be very proud."

Hannibal smirks. "I am very proud. The culinary arts are my pride and joy, and I am glad that I am able to give you a bit of that joy."

Except this isn't the joy of the kill. "My taste buds are blessed." The flesh that her teeth bite into does not belong to a human, and a small part of her is surprised that he isn't feeding her his usual prey.

They talk of many things, and conversation flows easily between her and Mischa. They discuss music, piano mostly, and she answers Mischa's questions about performance and art. Hannibal smiles lovingly all the while, and Elio is quieter than Annabelle would expect. It's not as if he is rude - he is a very kind host that meets all of her expectations of Hannibal's husband - but she can tell that his mind is much louder than his softly spoken words. His eyes dart across the room, picking apart Annabelle's movements and words, but he rarely ever comments. His eyes watch her lips when she speaks, not her eyes, but it's nothing sexual. It's almost a curiosity as to how her mouth molds the words she chooses.

But as Elio watches Annabelle, Hannibal watches Elio. Soft, loving gazes almost cradle Will, and he looks smitten. He looks happy, unbearably so. His eyes light up when Mischa speaks about her knowledge of music and art, and he smiles when Will throws in a smart comment about art or morals or life in general.

He looks like he's in love.

Annabelle smiles at the thought. Hannibal is happy here. She was scared that she'd find an angry Hannibal that killed anyone who dared cross him, a Hannibal that fit the traditional mold of insanity, and she feels herself relaxing knowing that Hannibal is happy here. It makes everything easier for her. She doesn't have to tiptoe as much as she'd planned, and Hannibal might even… easily accept her back into his life. She's sure he already suspects the truth, but waiting will be less painful, now knowing that her life isn't on the line.

Hannibal excuses himself quickly to prepare the desert, and promptly refuses when they offer their assistance.

"I'd like for it to be a surprise," he says.

Annabelle smirks into her wine glass. "Very well, then."

Hannibal smiles and walks off to the kitchen.

"How long have you been married to Rafael?" Annabelle asks Elio after sipping at her wine.

Elio hesitates before asking, feigning the need to count. "Two years," he answers eventually.

"And how did you meet?" She asks.

Mischa looks to Elio with her big blue eyes, wondering how he will answer.

Elio smiles softly, perhaps at the memory. "A mutual friend introduced us, and I hated him the moment I saw him."

Annabelle chuckles. "How on earth could you hate a man like him?"

Elio raises his eyebrows and sighs. “He was Mr Perfect, with his three piece suits and polite attitude. Everything I grew up hating, because usually it’s all fake.”

“What changed?” Annabelle asks.

“He brought me breakfast,” Elio says softly, smiling. His eyes are fondly outlining his wine glass. “And Mischa loved him very quickly, so of course I had to learn how to tolerate him. He became a friend, an anchor for us.”

Annabelle smiles, leaning forward and tucking her hand under her chin, resting it on the back of her hand. “First date?”

Elio snorts. “This feels like an interrogation, Ms DuBois.”

She smirks. “Maybe it is. I want to know your side of the story, not just Rafael’s romanticized version.”

Elio scoffs. “He does like to make everything so much more… romantic. Cheesy, almost.”

Annabelle laughs softly. “So, do tell. First date.”

Elio nearly rolls his eyes. “Not counting the time he brought me breakfast…” he trails off and tries to think.

Mischa watches him carefully, and when he doesn’t speak after a few more moments, she answers for him. “They never really went on proper dates. Dad was convinced that Rafael was too deep into a social group that he could never be a part of, so usually when they were together, it was just evenings at Rafael’s house. Dinner and conversation and other things.”

“Are you implying things that should not be mentioned at the dinner table?” Annabelle asks and Elio sputters slightly.

Mischa laughs freely and smirks at her father. “Maybe. But they were dancing around each other for sooo long, it was awful.”

Elio rolls his eyes. “No it wasn’t.”

Mischa raises a brow and gives him what Annabelle would call a ‘bitch face.’ “Yes, it was. You’d go to his house, he’d come to ours, you’d have deep conversations about the human psyche and the meaning of life, and you’d always look at each other with this *longing* that made me want to vomit.”

Annabelle has to laugh a bit at Mischa’s stressed out expression.

“They’d compare themselves to Patroclus and Achilles, the famous *lovers* of Greek mythology, but they’d never mention anything about their feelings for each other,” Mischa continues. “Never.”

“Rafael was the one who did the comparing and stayed silent about it,” Elio mutters, and Annabel can’t help but notice the way he stumbles over his husband’s name.

“You say your husband’s name her strangely,” she notes softly.

Elio looks to her in confusion, tilting his head ever so slightly. “What do you mean?”

“You say his name as if it was a stranger’s name, and it sounds alien on your tongue.”

Elio narrows his eyes. “A part of me wants you to elaborate.”

Annabelle nods. “I think I have an analogy that fits, although it’s not really an analogy. It’s an… example, I guess.”

Elio waits.

“Mischa, cover your ears,” Annabelle says, and rolling her eyes, Mischa complies. “For a lack of a better way to phrase this: Rafael is not the name you scream in the bedroom.”

Elio sputters and flushes furiously, refusing to look anywhere near Annabelle, and she has to laugh at his reaction. He acts so *pure,* it’s adorable. Mischa uncovers her ears - she heard everything anyways - and laughs along with Annabelle. Elio looks absolutely mortified, and thankfully for him, Hannibal comes back into the room with a tray bearing their dessert.

One look around the room and Hannibal raises a brow and gives Annabelle a questioning look, but she merely chuckles into her drink.

“What have I missed?” Hannibal asks as he places the dessert before everyone.

“Nothing of importance,” Annabelle says cheerfully.

Mischa laughs and gives Elio a wicked grin.

“And this looks lovely, Rafael,” Annabelle says, her eyes flicking up to Hannibal’s. “Your cooking is truly an art.”

Hannibal smiles, proud, and begins serving the dessert. “I find that anything I do must be worth the time and effort I put into it, and once I put in that time and effort, I must do my best to make it art.”

Annabelle nods in agreement, a small flicker of pride in her. “Always fill the cup to the brim.”

Hannibal smirks. “Always.”

The rest of the evening is pleasant, and Annabelle quickly grows fond of Mischa. That little spark of joy and playful attempts at manipulation, it’s intriguing. Not to mention that Mischa knows very well how people view her - as a gentle, kind and sweet child - and she uses that to her advantage. Mischa has no current reason to manipulate Annabelle - not that she knows of, anyways - but Annabelle sees the little flickers of manipulation every once and awhile. The pleading looks given to her father, the easy going manners with Annabelle, and the way she holds herself as a dainty helpless soul, someone who needs to be protected.

But she never tries to manipulate Hannibal. There are no emotional traps or playful glances, but simply the truth. She *submits* to Hannibal, and seems to understand that she cannot manipulate him. She is weaker than him, and his to protect.

Annabelle wonders how intimately Mischa knows her fathers’ kills.

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It’s a few weeks since Annabelle came to dinner at the Angelos, and by now there is a second hand stand up piano in their living room, and Abigail has done nothing but sing high praise for Annabelle and her music. It’s endearing, and Hannibal’s glad that Annabelle has helped encourage Abigail to study the piano. She’s been happily starting from the basics and practicing an hour or more a day, but of course there are still little bumps in the road. Despite her enthusiasm, Hannibal is a ruthless teacher, and more than once Will has seen his daughter nearly snap at anyone who dared comment on her skills. It would be amusing if she wasn’t the daughter of two murderers.

“Each finger is independent, Abigail,” Hannibal murmurs as he takes hold of her dainty hand and outlines each finger. “Each one has power, and you must let them show that power. Do not rely on your arm for the strength, your movements will become too sloppy and you’ll waste energy. And if your forearms hurt, tell me immediately and we’ll rest. We don’t want to damage your arms when you’ve just begun.”

Abigail nods firmly and moves each finger up and down, one at a time.

Hannibal smiles softly, proud. “Good. Now, from the top.”

A Minor scale is played yet again, for the… third time? Will isn’t sure. They move onto arpeggios next, and Abigail struggles with the fingering on this one. The fifth, the fourth, the third, it all means nothing to Will and it’s slightly terrifying when Hannibal tells her to slow down and do it again and Abigail responds by finally snapping at Hannibal and telling him she can’t do it.

There’s silence, and then Hannibal is speaking softly to her, his voice kind.

“You have no reason to be perfect right now, Abigail,” he whispers. “You began less than two weeks ago, I’m not expecting you to be able to play Clair de Lune as Ms DuBois did. You’re making good progress.” He rests a heavy hand on her shoulder. “Deep breathes, and begin again.”

She hesitates for a moment, wanting to lash back out, yell at him for his nearly pitying tone, but she breathes, nods and obeys, slowly playing again.

After an hour of laboring at the stand up piano in their living room, Hannibal declares that enough for today. Abigail sighs loudly in relief - not even bothering trying to hide it - and Hannibal smirks at her, the golden sunlight casting rich shadows on his face as he smiles. His hair looks a bit like gold in the light, and Will chuckles quietly to himself at the image of Hannibal being a proper blonde. Hannibal catches Will’s laughter at his internal joke and gives him a questioning turn of his head, but Will waves it off and settles deeper into the couch with his book. Hannibal wants him to try to get a job at one of the English schools here to teach basic psychology, so of course he also gave him mounds of textbooks and philosophy rants about the subject. Will’s aware of most of them, of course, but it’s a little nice to refresh his mind on some of the finer points, especially since Hannibal has read all of these books religiously and would be able to see right through Will’s bullshit.

“Can I go take a walk to Annabelle’s house?” Abigail asks, stowing away her books in the piano bench.

“How many times have you seen her this week?” Hannibal asks.

Abigail shrugs. “Two? Three?”

Will raises a disbelieving brow. “You know exactly how many times you’ve seen her, Abigail.”

She sneers playfully at him as she grabs her coat and inches towards the door. “She’s good company and she isn’t as boring at Hannibal when she talks about philosophy and stuff.”

Hannibal makes a tiny grunt - his equivalent of his mocked offense - and he looks at Abigail with fond eyes. Fond eyes that have been forever present in Will’s life ever since they ran away.

“Is she expecting you?” He asks.

“She said I could come over around 3 PM,” Abigail says, shuffling closer to the door and mixing her stance with submission and pride. *Attempts at manipulation, but acknowledgement that she can’t manipulate Hannibal* , although this thought is buried deep in Will’s mind. It’s still hard, seeing Abigail as someone who lies and manipulates and kills. Even after so long.

Hannibal sighs softly, barely heard by Will and sits down next to him, the sigh escaping him as he sinks into the cushion. “Very well. Be back by seven and think carefully about things.”

Abigail nods eagerly and practically pounces at the door. “Thanks, Rafi! See you later!” She shouts before closing the door almost loudly behind her and running out.

Will smiles and rests his head on Hannibal’s shoulder. “I’m glad Annabelle likes her.”

Hannibal nods and rests his cheek on the top of Will’s mess of curls. Will has no plans to see civilization today, so his hair is of course a disaster of dark curls. A mess that he knows to be one of Hannibal’s very small and very secret weaknesses.

“Annabelle is a very… interesting soul, and I appreciate her willingness to spend time with Abigail. She needs a friend, and Annabelle seems like someone who…”

“Is experienced in our kind of life?” Will murmurs.

“Familiar,” Hannibal says. “She’s seen glimpses and I think she can see it in us.”

Will scoffs. “Let’s hope she doesn’t screw this up for us,” he whispers. *This* being freedom, being their domestic life, being their strange love that has come to fruition.

“It would be a pity to kill her,” Hannibal whispers back, kissing Will’s temple.

“How would you kill her?” Will asks before he can stop himself. They’ve spent a month and a half in peace and without death, but Will knows who he ran away with. Who he seduced. Hannibal Lecter, a psychopathic (or sociopathic according to Chilton) cannibal.

His head knows but not his heart. He needs to be reminded of the pain and the blood.

“Depends on how she has offended me,” Hannibal says blatantly. “If she was rude and crossed lines, I would mock her in death and cook her liver, kidney, and perhaps her lungs.”

Will says nothing, and the silence urges Hannibal to continue.

“If she betrayed us, I would make her death startling beautiful but… angry. I wouldn’t hesitate to hide my rage,” he continues. *Especially from me,* Will mentally adds. “I’d cook us her heart.”

“What if she became a risk?” Will murmurs. “One that hasn’t done anything but could.”

“I wouldn’t kill her when I could instead manipulate her,” Hannibal admits. “It’s much safer that way, and also more entertaining.”

Will scoffs at Hannibal’s little smile. “You psychopath.”

Hannibal raises a brow at him but his gaze stays fond. So fucking fond, almost too soft and too gentle and too loving. This conversation was supposed to remind Will of who he ran away with. Remind him of Beverly, Jack, Alana, Abigail, Miriam Lass, and all of the rest. All of the pain and suffering. Encephalitis and jail.

And yet here he is, whispering these things and making Will’s heart swell with *fondness* .

Hannibal kisses Will’s temple gently, his lips caressing Will’s skin and his hands cradling his jaw. “I thought there was no term for what I am.”

“Psychopath comes close enough,” Will mutters, attempting to come off as grumpy.

Hannibal can only smirk. “There are other terms for what I am.”

Will gives him a disbelieving look. “Expand.”

Oh that smirk is going to kill Will.

“I am your husband,” he whispers into Will’s ear, his words a soft song. “I am a father.”

“You are also a monster,” Will reminds him, testing the limits. Testing how far he can go before Hannibal puts a knife in him. A cheese knife, to be exact.

“I am your monster,” Hannibal replies, kissing Will’s temple again. “As you are mine.”

Will groans quietly. “Don’t do this.”

“Do what?” Hannibal whispers, smirking against Will’s temple, his hands resting on Will’s shoulder and hip.

“Flirt while talking about murder,” Will mutters, giving him a disappointed glance.

Hannibal’s smirk only grows into a small, blissful smile, and he whispers, “Flirting *by* talking about murder, my dear Will.”

Will opens his mouth to make some snarky comeback, but meeting Hannibal’s eyes is a mistake. He’s trapped - again - by the warmth in Hannibal’s dark eyes, and he’s stunned by the pure… *joy* he sees there. The sunlight kisses his skin and gives him the impression of an angel, so Will can’t really stop himself from leaning in and kissing Hannibal softly on the lips, fondly. It’s become so natural, just to lean in and press his lips against Hannibal’s.

He stills as he mentally notes that this is what Hannibal wanted. What he planned. Hannibal was luring Will into a cruel, cruel trap where he could believe he was loved, and his only mistake was actually learning to love Will.

But just because he loves Will doesn’t mean his love isn’t seven levels of fucked up.

I am the lure, now. This is my design, not Hannibal’s. I’m in control here.

Will clings desperately onto the belief that he is the one in control.

“Are you happy here?” Will whispers against his slightly parted lips.

Hannibal hums in thought and kisses him again, fondly. “Immensely so.”

“Really?”

Hannibal leans back and pins Will with his gaze. “Why wouldn’t I be?” His hands shift across Will’s body and come to rest at his hands, grasping them tightly, fondly. His thumb rubs comfortingly against Will’s palms. Intimate. “We’ve escaped Jack and the FBI. We are together with Abigail. We’re in Florence, the place where I became a man.” He lifts Will’s hand to his lips and brushes his lips across the skin there, worshiping his fingers and palms. “And we’re together, as lovers.” Will can feel the smile against his skin. “Intimate.”

Will presses his lips to the top of Hannibal’s head, his hair sticking slightly to his lips. “We’ve never truly been intimate.”

Not all of the walls have been broken down, yet.

Brown, almost red eyes lift to meet blue. A bright, intelligent blue.

“Not yet.”

Will can’t help but shiver at those words. At the thought of being with Hannibal like that. Of finally binding the man to him, staking his claim on him and to truly be the only one to know him like this. Intimacy of minds and bodies.

And there’s also the lovely extra of erasing Alana’s touch from Hannibal’s skin.

“Are you hungry?” Hannibal asks as his hand comes to rest on Will’s stomach.

Will shrugs. “I could eat.”

Hannibal smiles. “Let’s get something to eat. I know somewhere you will enjoy.”

~O~

“You look beautiful in the sun, Elio.”

Will snorts into his drink, something he knows Hannibal could kill him for if he wasn’t Will Graham.

“You’re so cliche,” Will mutters into his drink, catching Hannibal’s playful gaze.

“You don’t seem too averse to it,” Hannibal says, smirking like the self congratulating asshole he is.

“Don’t assume my thoughts,” Will responds, looking away and convincing himself he isn’t blushing. He’s doesn’t… blush. He’s a grown ass man, he can handle a little cafe date with his alleged husband. “No psychoanalysing.”

Hannibal smiles, and it’s as radiant as the sun. “Of course.”

They talk about little, pointless things. Music, art, new jobs, Abigail’s education. Nothing too deep or too complex, but Hannibal can tell that there is a tension to Will. A tension he knows a little sun won’t erase.

Will smiles at his husband, glowing golden under the sunlight. His gentle, fond, beautiful little lamb of a lover. He looks harmless, sitting across from Will at an outdoor table as they watch the people move past them and the wind blow the clouds by. No one would suspect the hidden fangs Hannibal so carefully keeps under check.

Oh but Will knows that Hannibal isn’t some quiet little *lamb.* He is the wolf which lured the sheep away before sinking his teeth in and enjoying the fruits of his hunt.

And it’s been very long since Hannibal hunted.

Will needs a reminder of the man who framed him for murder and insanity. Of the cruel *beast* inside Hannibal. And the most direct way to do so results in dead bodies.

At this point, Will isn’t scared of the fact that bodies will drop. He’s seen enough death and art made from death, and he’s fucking married to a cannibal. He’s not worried about the death. What he is worried about is whose bodies will fall. He’s scared of those bodies being… undeserving of the transformation Hannibal will gift them with. He’s scared that he’ll have to stomach deaths that aren’t *righteous*.

But he won’t let that happen. He *cannot* allow that to happen. He can convince Hannibal to kill someone deserving of death. Someone of his choosing. He can convince Hannibal to kill for him. And by doing so, he reminds himself of the monster in his bed. He sees for himself the glorious release of his monster.

Will gently wonders if he looks good in red.

“Will?” Hannibal asks softly, reaching out and grasping Will’s hand in his own, cupping it, cradling it. “Where have you gone?”

Will smirks slightly. “Nowhere. I’m still here.”

I was with you.

Hannibal gives him a disbelieving look but he lets Will’s little white lie pass. “Do you regret this? Coming with me?”

Will’s shocked by the sudden change in topic. Is that where Hannibal’s mind ran off to while he was contemplating murder? The dimly lit kitchen and Abigail’s quivering lips and his own

shaking body?

“No,” Will whispers, squeezing Hannibal’s hand comfortingly. “I don’t regret choosing this.” He pauses and lifts his eyes up to Hannibal’s. “Why?”

Hannibal shakes his head. “I was wondering what life would be like if you had not come with me. If you had truly betrayed me and sided with Jack.”

“You would have killed me, wouldn’t you?” Will whispers, watching Hannibal the way a hunter stalks his prey. Still as stone but ready to pounce.

“No,” Hannibal murmurs, caressing Will’s gaze with his own. “I could never bring myself to rid you from this world.”

“Abigail, then,” he accuses. “She would have died in that kitchen, just like the way Garret Jacob Hobbs tried to kill her.”

Hannibal doesn’t reply for a moment, and Will sees the truth in his eyes. He sees the blood bursting from Abigail’s throat a second time as Hannibal finishes Hobbs’ work. His design. He sees himself, helpless on the floor, not quite lifeless, and just conscious enough to watch Abigail die.

“You would have taken her from us,” he states. There is no room to question his words.

“People do foolish things when they are overcome with emotion,” Hannibal says, searching for an excuse for the crimes he never committed.

“And what emotions would have overcome you?” Will asks, demands. He already suspects the answer, knows the answer.

“Agony. Betrayal,” he says, plainly and almost… righteously. “I was drowned in the thought of being betrayed by you.”

Betrayal and forgiveness are best seen as something akin to falling in love.

“Betrayed you by doing what? Choosing Jack?” Will’s eyes narrow and his head cocks to the side as he leans forward, his forearms resting on the table.

“By denying the truth of yourself, of ourselves,” Hannibal says almost nonchalantly, as if he was ordering a cup of coffee. His eyes bore into Will’s, and there is a certain understating of the justification Hannibal’s hypothetical actions have. “I made a place for Abigail in our world, made a world where she could fit and thrive under our care, and you nearly threw it away.”

“And you would have taken her out of my world, had I decided to throw your world away.” The words could have been spat and thrown cruely into Hannibal’s face, but they instead escape as a whisper, a gentle realization. A quiet damnation.

“Yes,” Hannibal admits.

Will nods and flicks his eyes away from Hannibal, instead resting on the water of the river, glittering in the sunlight.

I won’t leave you. I can’t leave you. Because if I leave, Abigail dies.

I am the lure.

“Let’s go back home,” Will whispers once their coffee and food is done.

Hannibal nods and rises to pay the bill. “Let’s.”

~O~

"Bitch, why do you always complain?"

The woman says nothing, only turns her head away and keeps walking.

"Listen to me, for fucks sake! I am your husband and I deserve more respect!"

The woman clenches her teeth and says nothing.

"Mina!" He shouts before slapping her across the face.

Will feels Hannibal tensing beside him as they walk past the now screaming couple, his hands itching to do something. Not to defend this woman's honor, but to destroy what little is left of the man's. He looks up slightly to watch Hannibal's profile, an image of stony control, but Will can see the clenched jaw and the eyes that never stray from the pavement in front of them.

A hunt is long overdue.

He grasps Hannibal's hand and leans in, their shoulders pressing up against each other. What he has in mind is reckless, careless, idiotic, foolish, and the whole like, but he needs it. *Hannibal* needs it. He needs that tension to be released and he needs to *see* the monster hidden away behind his person suit. The cold and calculating monster has been seen, has been brutally revealed to him when he was thrown in jail, and he doesn't need to know it anymore. He is aware of how manipulative Hannibal can be. He is aware of how carefully Hannibal planned his demise. He is aware of the calculating devil.

But he has yet to fully see the monster without control, without grace, without caution. The beast which lashes out at throats without a second thought, the monster which nearly gutted

Will in his kitchen. He needs to see Hannibal laid bare before him, completely devoid of any lies and person suits. Simply blood and fire.

Simply *vulnerable.*

“Hannibal,” Will whispers, almost seductively into Hannibal’s ear, his breath hotly brushing against Hannibal’s skin. His eyes flicker once more to the asshole of a man, and then back to Hannibal. “I want him.”

Hannibal hesitates before moving, before responding, and when he does, he turns his head to meet Will’s eyes and he is delighted by the determination and… darkness he sees in Will’s eyes.

“Are you sure, my love?” Hannibal whispers back, keeping his eyes trained on Will’s. “Do you really want to do this, Will?”

Will chuckles halfheartedly, leaning close to whisper into his ear again. “I think a hunt is long overdue.”

God, the shiver that runs up Hannibal’s spine is *delightful* , and Will takes a moment to see through his eyes. His lover, his newly wed lover, is here in his arms and asking to indulge in one of his pleasures. A pleasure where they will both be laid bare before each other, and they may decide whether or not the other is worthy of their affections.

Hannibal smirks, a devilish crack in his facade, and he kisses Will lightly on the temple. “Would you hunt so impulsively, without a plan?”

Will scoffs, pulling Hannibal into a nearby store so they may circle back around to find their victim. “You know I would.”

“I know that you have,” Hannibal responds, his eyes sparkling with childish glee.

“And when have I done such a thing?” Will mused, his eyes meeting Hannibal’s. “You’ll have to remind me.”

“When have you impulsively lashed out?” Hannibal murmurs, almost seductively. “When have you impulsively tried to kill someone?”

Will smirks, lowering his eyes. “I have never done such a thing.” He lifts his eyes. “I have only sent someone to do so.”

“Sent someone to do what you should have done yourself,” Hannibal murmurs.

“It was no less intimate that killing someone with a gun,” Will whispers, tilting his head up and watching Hannibal with gentle eyes. “And we both know that you demand intimacy between us.”

It’s lovely, watching the arousal rise in Hannibal’s eyes.

“Shall we follow him and ask some questions?” Hannibal whispers, his excitement almost physically present in the air.

“You’ll pose as a friend,” Will says.

“And we’ll pose as innocent.”

~O~

The man lives in a small apartment, a few miles south of their own place. After following him and striking up a pleasant (painful) conversation with the man, Hannibal can feel Will bristling with excitement next to him. He allows himself a small smirk at the sight of his dear

Will quivering in the anticipation of a kill, wondering briefly if this is how he was when he began. He'd like to think he was calmer and more sophisticated in his excitement, at least the planned murders. The initial ones were impulsive, acting on instinct to protect what little he had left, so Hannibal chooses to ignore what he felt during those. This kill he is about to share with Will is not an impulsive kill. A bit short of planning and timing, but still precalculated and waited for. This is much more elegant than just sticking a knife in a man's temple and calling it done. No, this is the one of Will's first steps in Hannibal's world, finally embracing the beauty of the darkness.

You beautiful thing.

It's four days later, and Abigail is staying with Annabelle for the night. Will had doubts about whether or not they should let her stay with someone they've only known for a couple weeks, but Hannibal had reassured him that nothing will happen.

"Abigail is strong and clever," Hannibal whispered the night before, brushing a strand of hair from Will's eyes as he learned over Hannibal, his eyes creased with worry. "If something were to happen, she would protect herself."

"Why do you trust Annabelle?" Will whispered.

Hannibal smiled. "She knows our kind. She knows what we are. She wouldn't dare go against us."

Will scoffed. "So your trust is placed in her fear of us."

"Basically," Hannibal said, smirking before softening his expression and leaning up to press a chaste kiss against Will's lips. "Trust me, *mylimasis* ."

Will isn't the only one eagerly anticipating this kill. Hannibal, for all his grace and control, nearly shivers at the thought of finally sharing a kill with his Will. Of finally seeing the darkness inside him, raw and exposed and entirely at Hannibal's mercy because Will has granted him access to these parts of his soul.

The man they're about to kill, his life is worth nothing. Abusive to his wife and holding a mediocre job. A boring man that Hannibal couldn't care less about. But his death, now that will be worth everything. He will be the catalyst to Will's finally stage of becoming. It's an understatement to say that Hannibal is excited for his death.

They ring the doorbell at 10:27, not quite late but still well enough into the darkness that no one will be roaming the streets leisurely at this hour. His wife - Mina - answers the door, and with a polite smile and authentic Italian accent, he asks if he can speak to her husband, posing as a friend. She is suspecting and scared, but with a few urges from Will, she nods obediently and goes back into the house to fetch him.

"You can see how terrified she is, right?" Will mutters under his breath, casting an angry glance at the closed door.

Hannibal nods. She has instincts ingrained into her to protect herself from danger and to flee at the sight of it, but unfortunately, she's been tied long enough to her husband to begin actively ignoring that gauge for danger. She has to live constantly with the most barbaric kind of monster, after all. A man who is unrightfully arrogant. Nothing more than a pig, in honestly, though. A pig destined for the slaughter. Hannibal quietly imagines a scenario of coming back to see the woman after her husband is disposed of, pretending to mourn yet guiding her to a safer place. Playing God.

There is some angry muttering on the other side of the door, and it jerks open to reveal their intended victim.

"Yeah?" The man grumbles in drunken Italian, abusing the language. *"Do I know you?"*

"We have some issues to discuss with you, concerning a promotion of sorts," Hannibal says, his voice honey on unsuspecting ears.

"You work with Signor Mateo?" He asks, setting a foot outdoors and inching the door closed behind him.

Hannibal nods. *"Would you like to close the door? Make it easier for us to discuss?"*

The man shrugs and steps completely outside in his sandals and closes the door roughly behind him. He honestly lacks a severe amount of grace for a human being.

"So? Does Signor Mateo want something from me?"

Hannibal smiles, a cruel wicked thing. He knows it raises the hackles on the man before him. Will is still beside him, the calm before their storm. *Are you ready, my love? Are you ready to take a life with me?*

"No," Hannibal muses, smirking as if he's just thought of some inside joke. *"We want something from you."*

The man's mind probably flicks to money, or drugs, or some stupid deal he became a part of many years ago. Whatever he is thinking, he never has time to speak his mind, because Will deftly slams the man's head against the wall, rendering him unconscious and limp in Will's arms.

"I'm not entirely sure what he was saying, but God he sounds annoying," Will mutters under his breath, a savage grimace on his face as he looks at the man. "Let's go."

They take the man - Will can't be bothered to know his name, he'll see it soon enough on the headlines - to an alley a few blocks down, holding him with his arms slung over their shoulders, as if he was drunk. When they arrive at the alley, they drop him on the ground with little grace and stand before him, like a couple of young gods, eager for their sacrifice.

"Do you wish to see him displayed?" Hannibal murmurs as he hands Will the knife, his own knife, glinting in the dim moonlight.

Will thinks for a moment, nothing more, and shakes his head. "He doesn't deserve it," he murmurs. "He's subhuman."

Hannibal could kiss him there and then.

The man wakes soon enough - does it matter how much time has passed? - and Hannibal opens his mouth to suggest gagging the man to avoid being discovered, but before the words have passed his lips, Will has deftly slit the man's throat after the first beginnings of a groan escaped his vocal cords. Blood spills from the wound, pouring like water spilling from the edge of a cliff, and it coats Will's hands and shirt. It looks black in the moonlight.

"Fuck," Will whispers, staring at the blood and the dying man before him. "It wasn't supposed to… it was supposed to be different."

Hannibal kneels next to Will and places a hand on his lower back, attempting to be soothing.

"It's alright."

"It was supposed to last longer, we were supposed to kill him together, and then I just-"

"Will." The word is small and stern, meant to ground him into the present moment. "I am not expecting you to-"

"No, Hannibal," Will whispers angrily, turning to Hannibal with a clenched jaw and desperate eyes. "This was supposed to be *our* kill. Where I could finally see you kill, with me, to lose yourself in the kill."

Hannibal takes a moment to formulate a response. "You wanted to see me for what I truly am."

Will laughs bitterly. I *need* to see you. I need to remind myself what I tied myself to."

“Have you not seen enough to be convinced of what I am?” Hannibal murmurs.

“What I’ve seen? What I’ve seen is the aftermath of things, Hannibal. The bodies displayed, already dead and mutated. The insanity boiling in my brain. The chips falling onto the table.” He chuckles another bitter laugh and hangs his head, gripping the knife tightly. “I haven’t seen you lose yourself in… in whatever it is.”

Hannibal brings a hand to caress Will’s cheek and the small stubble there. “You have.”

Will turns his head to glimpse at Hannibal with blue eyes that reflect the pale moonlight.

“You saw me break,” Hannibal whispers. “You saw me respond to the threat of losing everything.”

A knife in my stomach, and my daughter bleeding out on the floor.

“I did lose myself,” he continues, pressing his forehead to Will’s temple. “I lost myself to the very thought of being betrayed by you. I lost myself to whatever this is.” This being this relationship. This being this companionship that involves too much death and betrayal and lies twisted into their lives.

“I lost myself in you,” Will whispers, thoughtful. “But at the same time, I found myself. I’ve never known myself as well as I know myself when I’m with you.”

Hannibal brings the hand on Will’s lower back to rest on his nape, brushing the hairline. “I have lost myself. I’ve lost myself in you.”

They stay there for a while, kneeling side by side and breathing the same air, before Will shuffles away and looks Hannibal in the eye. “Show me,” he whispers before clearing his throat and speaking more clearly. “Show me how to remove the organs.”

Hannibal pauses for only a moment. “Are you sure?”

Will nods and presses the knife into Hannibal’s hand. “I need to see.”

The knife is handled with care and evidence of experience, and he quietly directs Will to move the body into a more accessible position, laying flat between their kneeling figures. The knife is drawn down the chest, drawing dead blood, and while Hannibal’s better sense is screaming at him to find a scalpel and put gloves on Will’s hands which delve beneath the skin of their victim, he can’t be bothered. The sight of his Will coated in blood and reaching deeper into his kill… it’s delightful. This is what Hannibal has been waiting for, wishing for and cultivating out of Will since the moment he glimpsed madness behind non-prescription glasses.

Removing almost all of the organs takes time, and Hannibal knows that they need to leave time to clean and remove evidence, but he allows himself to indulge in this for once. To watch with patient eyes as Will catalogues the methods of removing flesh from a man. They remove everything but the lungs, and Hannibal wonders if there is some sort of meaning Will intends by it. Everything but breath stolen?

“I want to leave it all here,” Will murmurs once the chest cavity is clear of everything but the lungs, the other organs scattered across the floor around them. “Put is back and let them find it. No trophies.”

Hannibal nods, but asks, “Why?”

Will smiles something that doesn’t reach his eyes and barely moves his lips. A twitch in the corner of his mouth. “He doesn’t deserve to be honored. He deserves to keep everything, but suffer for it.”

“Like the woman?” Hannibal asks. “Are you attempting to create a parallel?”

Will shrugs. “Maybe. She had a marriage but it was killing her. He has all of his organs, but he’s dead. And the Ripper always takes trophies. We aren’t taking any.”

Hannibal smirks a little as he places the heart back into the rib cage. “We are not the Chesapeake Ripper.”

Will scoffs softly and rolls his eyes. “No. We’re not. I dare say that we’re something more dangerous.”

“And sloppy,” Hannibal mutters. “We have a lot of evidence to remove.”

Will nods. “I trust you’ll help me clean this up.”

The body is laid out on the same street as the man’s home, his chest open and filled with bougainvillea: a fond memory of Hannibal’s first time in Florence. Prints and any DNA from the pair has been meticulously removed, and the only evidence left now are the two men, covered in blood, leaning against each other in an alley relatively far away from the body.

“I propose a deal,” Will whispers breathlessly against Hannibal’s jaw, his bloodied hands clutching to Hannibal’s arms, steadying himself. As if he needs steadying. It is quite clear to the both of them that Will has never been more stable, more clear headed.

“Yes?” Hannibal murmurs back, his eyes trained on his lover who is coiled tight, ready to pounce at a moment’s notice.

“Their deaths have to be righteous,” Will demands softly. “I won’t kill anyone for the sake of killing them.”

Even if a man lies a hundred meters away, beautifully carved open just because he was rude to his wife.

Hannibal nods as he nuzzles Will’s damp curls which stick to his skin. “Every death must have a purpose.”

“That is the darkness I hold inside me,” Will whispers, closing his eyes and resting his head on Hannibal’s shoulder. “I am not needlessly cruel.”

Hannibal hums in agreement. “Nor am I.”

Will raises his head and smirks. “No. It’s just that your reasons are often quite insignificant.”

Hannibal’s smile splits his face. “But there are reasons,” he reminds.

Will nods. “Yes. There are.”

Hannibal holds up Will’s head with a hand at his chin, watching him closely and memorizing the way blood latches onto Will’s skin. “But you finally feel it.” It’s not a question, but Will still needs to confirm it. Admit it to himself.

“Yes,” he whispers. “I’ve… I’ve always felt it.”

Hannibal hums, cradling Will’s face in his blood-coated hands. “Do you finally admit it to yourself?”

“Do I admit that I see your darkness in me?” Will whispers. “Do I finally admit to be the monster you molded me into?” The last words are spat softly.

“I never molded you into anything, Will,” Hannibal reminds him gently, like a mothering chiding a crying babe. “I can whisper through the chrysalis, but what hatches follows its own nature and is beyond me.” He brushes his lips against Will’s. “I didn’t mold you into what you are now. I simply tilted a light to it, allowing it to bloom.”

“Bloom under your guidance,” Will hisses.

“Yes,” Hannibal states. “I would not stand by and watch as you attempted to live a normal life and deny your true self. Not after you killed Hobbs.”

“You intervened long before that, Hannibal,” Will snaps. “You sent me after Hobbs.”

“I never made you kill him,” Hannibal murmurs. “I merely gave you the opportunity to do so.”

Will laughs bitterly and pushes away enough to meet Hannibal’s eyes. “And have I finally become the monster you see me as? Have I met your expectations? Even with a quick kill and a messy display?”

Hannibal narrows his eyes at the slight self hatred he sees under Will’s words. “You have become everything I never expected and everything I never knew I wanted.”

Will scoffs, pulling away, but Hannibal pulls him close again.

“You are beautiful,” Hannibal whispers, the words a psalm against Will’s skin. “Even more so than anything I could ever imagined.”

“Beautiful?” Will whispers, clutching onto Hannibal. “Beautiful, now that I am caked in blood and in your grasp?”

“No,” Hannibal murmurs, kissing Will chastely on the corner of his mouth. “Beautiful, now that you have finally shed your person suit and been laid bare before me.”

Will watches Hannibal closely, watches the adoration and worship he sees in Hannibal’s eyes.

“I am not your puppet,” Will reminds them, himself more so. “I am not your toy to wind up and let loose.”

Hannibal shakes his head. “Never, Will.”

“Never *again* ,” Will corrects softly. “I am your equal. I stand on the same grounds as you, knowing the same things and holding the same amount of power.” His eyes narrow and his jaw sets. “I am my own person, with my own darkness, and I am choosing to share this with you.”

“And I am honored,” Hannibal whispers into Will’s cheek.

“We are the same, now,” Will whispers.

“Finally.”

There has been a tenderness in this past month, but tenderness could only last so long. Gentleness could only be present for so long. The storm inside them has held its breath for long enough, and now thunder has come.

Will kisses him, softly still. “So make us one.”

Hannibal watches him with awe.

“Take me home,” Will whispers.

“Always,” Hannibal replies.

~O~

The journey home was first quick and efficient, but then slower and more careless, and now, as the door is unceremoniously shoved open, it's hopeless and desperate. Hands are threaded through hair, roaming bodies and touching anything and everything. Feet stumble through the threshold, attempting to hold their bodies steady, but there's just too much to hold up. Someone shoves the other roughly up against the door, kissing without mercy, and hands hold waists and jaws, securing the other in place. The dimly lit room reveals Will to be pressed against the door, his spine arching to touch more of Hannibal, and his hands are digging into his hips as he drags his lover closer. Hannibal holds Will's head in his hands, maneuvering him as he pleases, kissing and biting and whispering soft words of adoration and dedication.

" *Mylimasis* ," Hannibal whispers, dropping his head to worship the length of Will's neck, revealed as the buttons come undone with nimble, eager hands.

"Get back up here," Will demands with a groan as Hannibal latches onto his skin with unforgiving yet loving teeth. "I'm not done kissing you."

Hannibal chuckles against Will's pulse, smiling as he feels the blood rush under his skin. "You mean *attacking* my mouth."

"I didn't hear you complaining," Will mutters as he attempts to drag Hannibal back up to his lips.

"I was quite busy having my mouth assaulted by you," Hannibal teases, dropping further down Will's newly revealed chest, nosing along the scars and curves of muscle.

Will can only respond with a breathy chuckle which melts into a soft moan as Hannibal reaches his jeans.

"I still don't understand your love for jeans," Hannibal whispers against the bulge in Will's apparently appalling jeans.

“They’re practical,” Will whispers, his eyes fluttering shut despite his desperate need to watch Hannibal do whatever he’s about to do.

“Well, not at this moment,” Hannibal smirks, lifting his eyes to Will’s face. “Right now, clothing in general is impractical.”

“Then get them off of me, *Hannibal,”* Will whispers, smirking at the soft moan that barely escapes Hannibal’s lips.

Will swears he can hear Hannibal mutter a quiet ‘fuck,’ and it’s a lovely feeling: making the great Hannibal Lecter utter such profanities.

The jeans are thrown away without mercy, leaving Will in only his tightening boxers and dangling shirt. Hannibal rises to kiss Will again, but Will ducks his head to kiss at Hannibal’s neck, his own hands practically ripping away the shirt and trousers Hannibal has on.

“Get them off,” he hisses at Hannibal’s skin, and Hannibal laughs at the lack of control Will seems to have.

“But of course,” he whispers in reply, joining Will’s hands in the battle against thread and buttons.

They stumble across the room, one article of clothing joining the next in a trail to the bedroom. They both nearly fall when Hannibal’s trousers fall to his ankles, stumbling and catching themselves on the edge of the couch, and Will is tempted to just stop and do it on the couch.

“No,” Hannibal whispers, knowing Will’s thought when he catches the longing gaze to the couch. “I wish to take my time with you.”

“Fucking on the couch too crass for you, Hannibal?” Will whispers against his throat.

“It’s not *intimate,”* Hannibal growls.

“And you demand intimacy between us,” Will murmurs.

“I think we deserve it, considering we are both covered in the blood of our shared kill.”

He scoffs. “And taking a life together is most intimate.” Even if the death wasn’t shared. Merely the aftermath.

“It is,” Hannibal mused. “The basest instinct laid bare before each other, and accepting each other for it.”

“Loving each other for it.” He kisses at the collarbone before him, worshipping the skin with his lips.

“So let me take you to bed,” Hannibal pleads softly. “Let me show you everything.”

Will kisses him in reply.

This month in Europe has been intimate. It has been tender, loving, and the aspect of life Will found himself desperately scared of losing. He woke every morning besides Hannibal, kissing him and murmuring words of adoration, before greeting a very grumpy Abigail in her bedroom. They’d rise after the sun did, lounging about the kitchen, being sappy and at peace. He’d taught Abigail how to make fishing lures, twisting the thread between their fingers to construct a design that could never be replicated. He’d laid with Hannibal in the sun, stretching in the sun like an overly pleased cat. His life had become simple, bright, and happy. Abigail alive, Hannibal with him, and the sunlight turning his skin slightly tan.

He’s been strangely happy.

Happy, and scared. Scared of losing this happiness he has been given, scared of Hannibal taking away what he had given. Scared of waking to Abigail bleeding out on the kitchen floor and a knife in his gut.

I am the lure. This is his mantra, his prayer. He has seduced Hannibal Lecter, and must continue to do so if he is to keep Abigail alive.

But while he lures, Hannibal stalks. And Will, the only one who could truly understand Hannibal, has been stalked and hunted. Hannibal is strung up on his hook, but he's stuck in between Hannibal's teeth. Impaled, mounted, and displayed on his Ravenstag's antlers. His beloved Ravenstag with it's soft fur and warm embrace.

It's too easy, loving Hannibal.

The door to their bedroom is opened with unsteady hands, demanding hands, and they finally fall together onto the bed, Hannibal below Will as he straddles him, still kissing. Hands tilt Will's head down to Hannibal can properly kiss him, tongue curling around tongue, tasting and assaulting mouths, leaving nothing unexplored. This… this is familiar. Wrapped in Hannbal's arms and kissed sweetly. This is what Will has been given for the past month. This is what he has learned to cherish.

But this isn't everything Hannibal can give. This isn't everything Hannibal is. Hannibal is… dark. He can be cruel, merciless. He is the image of the devil, beautiful, yet everything will should fear, hate, even. So what does that make Will? The angel that Hannibal has corrupted, or the devil that Hannibal has revealed? The sheep in wolf's clothing or the wolf in sheep's clothing?

"Where has you mind run off to?" Hannibal murmurs into the patch of skin under Will's ear, kissing it softly.

Will shakes his head lightly. "Nowhere. I'm here."

Hannibal chuckles lightly, the sound more felt that heard, his chest rumbling against Will's. "I surely hope so. I wouldn't want you to run off as I make love to you."

Will will refuse the blush that rises to his cheeks. Not even Abigail could make him admit it. “Is this what this is?” He asks lowly, rocking against Hannibal with full intent to seduce, accepting his fate of being seduced. “Making love? Is this not a result of blood passion?”

“This is a result of everything,” Hannibal whispers, as if conveying his sweetest secrets. Hands run up and down Will’s sides, desperate and full of intent. “Of every moment spent with you, climaxing in these moments.”

Will stills under his hands. “Is it really?”

Hannibal smiles something sweet and tender. “This is me, finally laying myself bare before you. An offering to the deity you have become.”

Will kisses him, silencing the foolish words. “You’re supposed to be fucking me, Doctor Lecter, not sweet talking me.”

“I am supposed to be making you writhe in pleasure, *mylimasis* ,” Hannibal utters simply as his hands dip down to rise and fall over the curves of Will’s body. “Worshipping you. Giving you everything I am.”

Will stutters as Hannibal’s hands drift down to cup his groin. “What you are,” he breathes. “Is a monster.”

Hannibal smirks, leaning in and whispering against Will’s lips, “What makes me a monster, Will?”

Will gives him a heated glare which morphs into a roll of eyes as Hannibal applies more pressure to his growing erection.

“Is it how I kill?” Hannibal whispers, dragging Will’s body against him. “How I eat? How I destroy others around me, manipulating them into my puppets for my entertainment? What was it, Will, that made you realize I am a monster?”

“How you lied to me,” Will hisses, grinding himself down onto Hannibal, smirking at the breathy moan that escapes him. “How you made me believe I killed my daughter and how you betrayed me and left me to *rot.”*

“I didn’t leave you, Will,” Hannibal whispers as he rolls Will onto his back, landing with a small ‘oof’ as he gently caresses him. “I quickened your becoming. I urged the darkness inside of you to rise.”

“I didn’t know that,” Will hisses, biting at Hannibal’s lips. “I didn’t know that you did it out of twisted love. I thought I was *abandoned* by you.”

Hannibal stills, resting his hands on Will’s hips. “I will never abandon you again, Will.”

“Really?” Will whispers, watching Hannibal carefully, lifting a hand to his cheek. “Will you never leave me?”

Hannibal shakes his head and dips down to kiss Will sweetly, tenderly. “Never.”

“Is this what you have to offer me?” Will muses as they kiss, his hands curling into Hannibal’s hair. “Tenderness and admiration?”

“I have my worship to offer you,” Hannibal whispers, leaning down and bracing his weight with his left arm beside Will’s head. “I just watched you kill a man with my knife, watched you submerge yourself in your own darkness rather than the darkness of others.” He kisses him again. “There is nothing but tenderness.”

“No darkness in the bedroom, then?” Will whispers. “No angry sex and kinky bondage?”

Hannibal chuckles, running his free hand up and down Will's sides. "Not yet." Another kiss. "Not tonight."

Will moans softly, surrendering to the feeling of Hannibal's hands on him. "Kiss me," he whispers, playing the desperate, submissive role. Submissive to Hannibal. Only Hannibal.

"As you wish," Hannibal murmurs, tilting his head down to kiss the skin of Will's arched neck. His body bends over Will, protecting him from the rest of the world, or perhaps hiding him away like a dragon with its horde. His lips worship - there is really no other word to describe what Hannibal does - Will, whispering promises of love in a language Will can't understand.

He continues to kiss Will, worship him with tender kisses, and he traces aimless patterns across Will's skin, painting a masterpiece that only Will can see. Will's hands find themselves threaded through surprisingly silky hair, cradling Hannibal's head and guiding him in his work. Soft moans are released, small shivers seize Will as he is lavished with kisses, and he finds himself relaxing, melting into Hannibal's touches. He's still hard, but the air of desperateness has disappeared, simply lost in the touches Hannibal gives him.

"You're such a sap," Will whispers playfully, grinning when Hannibal's eyes tilt up to meet his.

"I told you I would take my time with you," Hannibal replies, smirking into his next kisses. Will's skin and body is explored, discovered and recorded in the halls of Hannibal's mind. Lips tug on skin, bringing blood to the unbroken surface, and his tongue claims and memorized the feeling of Will's skin. "One day, you must let me spend hours merely memorizing you. Drawing you and committing you to memory. Reconstructing this body in my mind so I may know you better than anyone."

"You already know me best," Will reminds him, hands stroking Hannibal's head and hair while he smiles fondly.

Hannibal hums, acknowledging it before continuing to lather skin with kisses.

“This is far too slow, Hannibal,” Will groans softly when Hannibal refuses to touch where Will wants him the most.

“Would you like me to speed things up, then?” Hannibal rasps, moving up Will’s body slowly, lips brushing against skin before coming to rest and to whisper against Will’s mouth again. “Plunge headfirst into the pleasure without any patience?”

“I need to see you lose yourself in the pleasure,” Will whispers, nibbling at Hannibal’s lower lip, earning a soft moan. “Lose yourself in me.”

Hannibal watches him fondly. “Only if you return the favor.”

Will respond by surging up and shoving Hannibal into the bed, straddling him and kissing him harshly. Tongues twist and teeth click against each other, but Hannibal seems all too eager for this.

“Lose yourself in me,” Hannibal echoes, almost taunting Will.

I am the lure.

He grinds down on Hannibal’s not so soft groin and smirks at the groan released, followed quickly by hands yanking in his hair to drag him back down to Hannibal’s unforgiving mouth.

You are the hunter.

“Beautiful boy,” Hannibal rasps, his hands grasping Will’s jaw and hair.

Will can’t respond, so he only moves his hand down Hannibal’s chest - one that is endearingly covered in a patch of hair - to his firm stomach and then pausing at the hem of his underwear. He thumbs at the cloth there, pulling it up and down before moving away. The hand returns to cup at Hannibal’s erection through the material, and Hannibal moans, shifting his leg over Will’s hip to tilt him over and onto his back.

With Hannibal above him and in between his legs, he palms at his sex and takes his time in watching Hannibal crawl towards his release. His lips are parted, his bangs hanging over his eyes, cheeks flushed, and eyes *hungry* beyond belief. Beautiful.

He rests his head on Hannibal’s collarbone and whispers, “Are you fucking me or am I fucking you?”

Hannibal huffs out a chuckle, biting lightly at Will’s earlobe. “Depends.”

“On what?” Will’s hand slips under Hannibal’s boxers, and his breath catches when he feels heated flesh.

“On who seduces who,” Hannibal rasps, his eyes fluttering shut and head falling as Will palms at him.

“So you’d let me fuck you?” Will whispers into Hannibal’s ear, his cheeks tickled by his dirty blond hair stained with a touch of blood. “Let me own you, completely, and have my way with you?”

“Yes,” Hannibal breathes without hesitation. “I wish to give you everything, *mylimasis* .”

Well isn’t that convenient.

“Let me,” Will whispers, tender, as his hands peel away Hannibal’s boxers. “Let me lose myself in you.”

Hannibal kisses him again, desperately giving and taking from Will with his kiss. “Will you be gentle?” Hannibal gasps, pushing *down* as he speaks, lips pressing against lips. “Or would you take without mercy?”

Will grabs his hips and arches up into his touches. “I would make love to you,” Will responds. “I would give you everything I am.”

He can feel Hannibal’s smile against his lips. “What you are is *angry* , Will.”

“I can be tender,” Will snaps as he lips at Hannibal’s bottom lip and rock against him. “I can be loving, and gentle, and merciful.”

“What if I don’t want that?” Hannibal whispers.

“You want this to be tender,” Will reminds him, gasping as Hannibal’s hands push away the offending material of his boxers.

“I want this to be *intimate* ,” Hannibal growls, wrapping a hand around Will’s member. “I want you to give me everything you are and love me for everything I am.”

Will’s hips stutter against Hannibal’s touch. “Everything I am includes the anger and love I feel for you.”

Hannibal kisses him softly. “I know.”

“I’m still angry. I’m still pissed at the thought of Alana in your bed. At the thought of being betrayed by you. I’ve… I’ve forgiven you, don’t get me wrong,” Will whispers, almost angrily as they disentangle for a moment to pull down their boxers. “But you are not off the hook,” he hisses as he pounces on Hannibal again.

“I know, Will,” Hannibal murmurs, throwing away Will’s underwear. “I know.”

“You are *mine,* Hannibal,” Will hisses as the pleasure begins to mount. “Your designs are mine. Your life is mine.”

“As you are *mine,* ” Hannibal whispers, his voice honey and oozing through Will. “We are the same, now.”

We always have been.

Will shifts them gently so Hannibal lays on his back, his eyes never leaving Hannibal. Eye contact is held between them, and Hannibal’s gaze seems to caress Will in a heady embrace, cradling him. It’s odd, feeling so comfortable in the eyes of another. Odd, feeling safe in the grasp of a predator.

“Give me everything, Will,” Hannibal whispers, a hand coming up to touch Will’s cheek lovingly. “Lose yourself in me.”

Will drops his head to kiss Hannibal again, resting his forehead against Hannibal’s as he positions himself in between Hannibal’s legs and wrapping legs around his waist. “Lube?”

Hannibal kisses the corner of his mouth before stretching to the side to open the drawer beside their bed, shuffling through before coming back with a packet of lube.

Will chuckles against his lips as he leans back down. “Always so prepared.”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal muses. “Or eager.”

“Or hopeful,” Will adds, taking the packet from him and holding Hannibal’s erection with his other hand, pumping him slowly and driving Hannibal into pleasure. “You sure you wanna let me do this?”

“I trust you, Will,” Hannibal whispers. “I will give you everything.”

Will nods before bending down to kiss Hannibal again, using one hand to brace himself against the bed and another to explore the monster underneath his hands. The warm length of flesh which elicits the most delightful gasps, the endearing patch of hair, the strong thighs framing his hips, the dip in the flesh which leads to warmth and a puckered ring.

“I’ve never done this before,” Will whispers as he circles his finger around Hannibal’s hole. He slowly leans up to better see what the hell he's doing.

Hannibal hums softly and brings himself to his elbows so he can follow Will up, speaking against his lips. “I know. I’ll guide you.”

Will huffs our half a chuckle. “You’ve always guided me, regardless of whether or not I wanted your guidance.”

Hannibal smirks, bringing a hand to Will’s jaw and caressing it. “I trust you to be loving, if not gentle with me.”

Will quirks his eyebrows as a response before kissing Hannibal lightly on the lips. He tears open the packet of lube, spreading it on the fingers of his right hand, and he returns to the pocket of heat and brushed against the skin there.

“I trust you,” Hannibal whispers, arching into Will’s nervous touch.

Will nods, swallows, and pushes one finger gently, then more forcefully, pushing past the first ring of flesh and marveling at the heat of it. He can’t bring himself to look up at Hannibal’s face to gauge his reaction, but the man under him seems relaxed and content, welcoming Will’s touches. He pushes deeper, knuckles grazing across the rim, and Hannibal’s breaths are shallowing. He presses his face against the side of Will’s neck, and he kisses him softly.

“Move it in and out, slowly,” Hannibal whispers, the words almost a command.

Will can’t do anything but obey.

He pulls back the digit, lost in the feeling of the way muscle and flesh move against his finger. The ridges and bumps of one of the most intimate parts of Hannibal. He pushes back in again, still gently and almost shyly, when only the tip of his forefinger remains inside, and then repeats the motion, slowly becoming more daring and quick.

His lips find Hannibal’s, and they kiss gently as Will discovers him. Hannibal seems content, having a finger up his ass, but Will is a bit terrified of screwing this up. He knows the basics of gay sex - he’s been curious in his younger, more stable years - but it’s different to read about it and to actually do it. The heat and the intimacy of touching someone like this, it’s overwhelming. Making love to women is lust driven. Basic human desire to fuck and make babies. This isn’t that. This is… this is intimate. This is searching desperately for intimacy, for more intimacy, between two killers lost in each other’s minds.

He adds another finger at Hannibal’s demand, and under his guidance, finds that one spot inside that breaks Hannibal. He curls his fingers as Hannibal commands, searching for something, and when he finds it, Hannibal quivers underneath his touch and Will is lost in the amount of pleasure he sees flashing across Hannibal’s expression. Pure bliss in its basest form.

“Another,” Hannibal whispers, slamming his mouth back against Will’s, frantically curling his tongue around Will’s. “Now that you know where to touch.”

Will kisses him back with equal vigor, carefully inserting a third finger and crooking them again to find that spot, that special little spot that makes Hannibal lose it. He finds it again, and he grins at the way Hannibal bucks helplessly against his touch.

“Will,” Hannibal whispers. “Will.” Uttering his name just for the sake of uttering it. Letting the name roll of his tongue in pleasure.

A hand snakes around to touch Will's erection, and his movements stutter at the warmth that enfolds him. Hannibal moves his hand steadily, spreading the precome on Will's length and stroking him with a damning level of control.

"Fuck," Will gasps at the touch, his fingers inside Hannibal bucking like his hips.

"Continue, Will," Hannibal whispers, his voice raspy and thicker with his accent. "Fuck me with your fingers."

Oh fuck.

"Stretch me for you," Hannibal croons, breathing into Will's ear. "Prepare me, because once you're properly inside me, I doubt neither of us will have enough control to make this gentle."

Will moves on and out, albeit unsteadily, and adds more lube to make it easier to slip in and out of Hannibal.

"That's it," Hannibal murmurs, kissing Will again, still pumping his cock in his hand. "You're doing so well, *mylimasis.* So gentle, so loving. Although I suspect that that will quickly change when you put that impressive cock inside me."

Will snarls into Hannibal's mouth, his hips bucking into Hannibal and his hand wet with lube. "If you're still talking, I'm obviously not doing so well."

Hannibal smirks and allows a moan to pass his lips. "Then I suggest putting more effort into it."

Damn you, Will hisses in his mind, pressing every patch of flesh inside except for that one spot. Everywhere but where Hannibal wants. The room is filled with the sounds of heavy breathing, the slick of the lube, and the occasional profanity one of them will utter. After

forever and no time at all, Hannibal grabs Will's wrist and pulls his fingers out, leaving Will's hand oddly cold.

"I'm ready for you," Hannibal whispers heavily, kissing Will while grasping both sides of his head, licking into his mouth. "Give me everything."

Will shudders and wraps an arm around Hannibal's waist and using the other hand to line himself up to Hannibal's flexing hole. He presses the tip against it, not in, not yet, and pauses as he meets Hannibal's eyes.

"You're beautiful," Will whispers as he pushes in, slowly and not so steadily. His breath hitches at the warm and the tightness, gasping at the way Hannibal holds him. "You're so beautiful."

Hannibal kisses him, his own breathing a heavy pant.

"The darkness," Will murmurs, pushing in deeper and deeper, losing himself in the heat of it all. "It's beautiful. You are beautiful."

"So are you, Will," Hannibal manages to utter, arching his spine to better allow Will to slip inside of him.

"I see you," Will whispers, almost desperately as he finally fully buries himself in Hannibal, his hips pressed flush against Hannibal's. "I've always seen you."

Hannibal holds him and kisses him. "I know."

Will pulls out slightly, only to push himself back into the almost suffocating heat. "I need you."

“And I you,” Hannibal replies immediately. “So, make love to me, Will. Give me everything. Lose yourself in me.”

Will shudders and moans as he pulls out almost all the way, only to slam back inside. “ *Hannibal* .”

Will pulls in and out, in and out, in a steady, broken rhythm, slowly lost in the warmth.

“You’re quite impressive,” Hannibal notes softly after Will pushes in and grazes his prostate. “Larger than what I’ve taken before.”

“How many have you taken?” Will hisses, suddenly seized with jealousy at the thought of someone else knowing Hannibal like this.

“Not many,” Hannibal whispers into the column of Will’s glistening throat. “A few. They were all quite disappointing.”

“Are they alive?” Will can’t help but ask.

“Most of them, no,” Hannibal muses. “I ended up disposing of them.”

Wil’’s movements stutter and he can’t help but slam his mouth over Hannibal’s, taking and giving all he can. “You’re mine, *Doctor Lecter* ,” Will hisses, his hands settled over Hannibal’s chest, exploring skin. “Mine.”

“As you are mine,” Hannibal murmurs, that murmur soon morphing into a quiet, pleased moan. “That’s it, Will. Right there.”

Will pushes in and out, dragging the pleasure through his body and stuttering as he leans over Hannibal: lips caressing lips. The quiet mixture of soft moans and murmurs of affection and

the obscene sound of flesh moving against flesh is a symphony against Hannibal's ears. A piece of music composed for Will and him, and only for them.

He reaches an unsteady hand to Will's face, lost in adoration for the man above him and inside him, in every sense. This is his beautiful boy, finally hatched from the chrysalis, beautiful and unpredictable. He allows himself to let go, to not lose control but to surrender it to Will, stepping into the warmth and the basic pleasures of the flesh. Skin on skin and body inside body, as mind is inside mind.

The sweat collects on their skin, coating them in a heady, human scent. Will can feel his pleasure building, cooking inside him and inside Hannibal, and he can see that Hannibal feels it as well, whether it's Will's pleasure or his own that he feels. With a shaky hand, he wraps his fingers and palm about Hannibal's length, wet with precome, and moves up and down, marveling in the feeling of another man, another human, a monster in a person suit, just like him. He twists and moves and tugs on Hannibal, earning almost elegant yet debauched moans, and he drinks them in like fine, fine whiskey.

"Is this intimacy?" Will whispers against Hannibal's lips. "Is this what you wanted?"

Hannibal kisses him with unsteady lips. "This is the beginning. The beginning of… everything."

The pleasure then touches the point just before the peak, glancing off of the climax, and suddenly Hannibal is pulling away.

"Hannibal?" Will cannot help the small, frantic whisper, almost *whimper* that escapes him.

He watches Hannibal for answers for what feels like forever and never, but his answer is given. Hannibal pushes Will back, over, and practically slams his back against the bed, eliciting a squeak of springs and an unruly slam against the wall. The breath is yanked from Will's chest, and then stolen once again as Hannibal straddles him begins sinking down onto Will, throwing his head back and throwing moonlight off of his skin.

Like this, with his eyes watching Will as if Hannibal was the predator and Will his unfortunate prey, Hannibal is the image of sin. Perhaps not Hannibal's image of it, with pallid demons and marble creatures, but this is how Will imagines it. Hannibal is the Devil, beautiful, oh so beautiful, and emerged in the pleasures of the flesh. The sex and the sin and the death, all a prelude, foreplay, to the climax.

Will wonders if this makes him a devil worshiper but at this point he cannot give two shits.

Hannibal rises and falls on Will, shamelessly moaning and driving Will insane, baiting him to lose himself even further and just slam *up* into the warmth of Hannibal's body. Will isn't ashamed to say that he takes the bait.

Driving himself up, in, deep, it's delightfully base. This is raw, exposed, and there are no illusions here. Hannibal is his. He is Hannibal's.

"I want you to come inside me," Hannibal rasps, watching Will intently.

Will responds with hands digging deeper into Hannibal's hips and a desperate slam up.

"That's it," Hannibal whispers, head falling forward and hair brushing against Will's head, adding to the image of… debauchery. "Lose yourself."

Will feels the last frantic staggers toward climax, and he wraps his arms around Hannibal's waist, dragging him closer and burying himself in Hannibal with a shudder and hitch of breath. Hannibal falls forward with almost his entire body, leaning against Will and pressing his cheek to the top of Will's head, turning and kissing it, whispering words of adoration as he feels his own orgasm stumble through him.

The room reeks of sex and sweat and blood, but Will has never felt more content and… happy. *Endorphins from the sex* , he tells himself. Kisses from his lips bury themselves on Hannibal's neck: worshiping skin.

I’m yours.

“You were perfect,” Hannibal whispers into the mess of curls. “Beautiful.”

Will chuckles, the sound vibrating in between them, like a purr. He hands knead into Hannibal’s lower back, and he’s very aware of the fact that he’s still inside Hannibal.

“We should probably shower,” Will whispers into the crook of Hannibal’s neck.

Hannibal hums and tilts Will’s chin up so their eyes meet. “Not yet,” he whispers. “Let’s just… lay here for a moment.”

Will chuckles again, and Hannibal finds himself utterly fond of the sound. “First let’s actually lay down, then.”

Hannibal smirks, and he allows Will to slip out and maneuver them onto their sides, facing each other. Hannibal pulls Will half onto his chest, his head tucked beneath Hannibal’s chin.

“So,” Will murmurs, hands fiddling with the hair on Hannibal’s chest.

“So,” Hannibal echoes, smirking fondly at the curls underneath his chin.

“We killed a guy,” Will begins, his voice almost sarcastic. “We mutilated him. We came home. And we fucked.”

Hannibal allows himself a quiet laugh, wrapping his arm more tightly around Will’s shoulder. “I’d prefer to call it love making rather than fucking, but to each their own, I guess.”

Will snorts. “Sap.”

Hannibal smiles and kisses the top of Will's head. "Fucking implies being detached and having no emotional connection to the one who you are fucking. Love making, well, we both know the connotations that holds."

"Love making usually doesn't come after murder, Hannibal," Will mutters, his eyes flickering the blood that their sweat has washed off and the blood that has still cling tightly to their skin.

Hannibal allows Will's comment, but says, "It was love making nonetheless."

"Why are you being so… fond and gentle?" Will whispers. "I was expecting kinkier sex."

Hannibal laughs at that, the sound loving on Will's ears. "Because I am happy, Will." He shifts Will in his arms so they lay beside each other, eyes meeting. "I am-" He brushes a strand of hair from Will's eyes. "- content."

Will looks to Hannibal fondly, a small smile on his lips. "We're finally together. Conjoined."

Hannibal smiles in agreement and presses a kiss to the top of Will's forehead, tasting salt on his skin. "I doubt either of us can survive separation."

"We are the same, now," Will murmurs, thinking back to the time where he was terrified of becoming like Hannibal. Terrified of the dark.

Silence fills the space between them, but it's heavy with skin touching skin and the steady beating of their hearts, all coated in the warmth of their adoration and bliss. The silence, the comfortableness of it, seems to enhance the intimacy between them. There are a thousand unspoken promises woven into the silence around them, promises that once brought Will to his knees in fear. But now, it's different. This is different.

They've both had their fair share of lovers, but *this*, this bond, this is different. This was deeper, more meaningful. This is coated in blood and murder and darkness, making them unbearably delighted.

This isn't Alana. Or Margot. Or whoever they've slept with. This isn't a game. Maybe once, when Will was an innocent and Hannibal his puppeteer, but not in this moment, as they lay in their sweat and semen. This sweet and playful game has evolved, into lust and power and death, and dear God it's *addicting.* Dreamlike.

It is just a dream, after all.

They clamber out of bed to shower a few minutes into the silence. They move around each other like water, accommodating and graceful. *Like the water that fills his lungs and drenches his skin.* Clothes stained with deep red are collected and tossed into the fire; the ashes will be thrown away in the morning. They showever together, touching and kissing but nothing more. This is enough. This intimacy is enough.

After cleaning and showering (and kissing), they finally shuffle back into bed with content smiles on their faces as Hannibal pulls Will close against his chest, smiling.

"This is all I ever wanted for you, Will," Hannibal whispers against Will's hair.

"It's beautiful," Will replies, his voice a barely heard murmur against Hannibal's chest.

Beautiful indeed.

Chapter End Notes

Heeeeeyyyy so I was hoping this would be the most epic chapter besides the chapter where Mischa is confronted, but it didn't really turn out the way I wanted it to. I'll be going back and editing it to make it more... Will Graham and less OC vibes. But we'll see how it'll go from here.

I am afraid this is all un-beta read, and it would actually be really cool if one of you guys could help me with that, just to help keep everyone in character. Just comment and I'll reach out to you.

Thanks to everyone who is reading this and leaving such lovely comments!!! You guys make my day, seriously.

The Lioness

Chapter Summary

> The aftermath of Will and Hannibal making love unfolds, and the beginnings of Annabelle's plan come into the light, involving a certain poet...

Chapter Notes

> Edited 13 Nov 2019. (I forgot that Annabelle has a prosthetic leg and needed to make some edits to the scene between Antony and her bc fucking without commenting on the lack of a leg is kinda a big deal.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Is Abigail still at Annabelle's?"

A hum sounds from the other side of the kitchen. "They're having breakfast together."

Will shakes his head and walks over to Hannibal's side, preparing the coffee. "I never thought Abigail would attach herself so quickly to someone like this."

Hannibal says nothing for a moment, adjusting the eggs in the frying pan before replying. "Abigail recognizes the darkness in Annabelle, and I believe that she finds comfort in it, as well as the illusion of living a normal life."

"How far do you think Annabelle's darkness goes?" Will murmurs, reaching for a mug.

Hannibal smirks. "I was curious about that myself, so I did a small bit of research into Annabelle DuBois."

Will chuckles. “Did you now?”

“Annabelle DuBois has been performing for a few years, not too long, but she looked quite different five years ago.”

Will glances at Hannibal and the sizzling stove.

“Simply put, the Annabelle DuBois we know today is an imposter of whoever is the real Annabelle DuBois.”

Will raises a brow at this, not stopping with his preparations for coffee. He’s not surprised by this, he knew Annabelle - or *not* Annabelle - had darkness, so she must be hiding something. Whether or not her name is Annabelle DuBois doesn’t matter, though. “Is Abigail safe with her?”

“Do you think I would allow Annabelle anywhere near Abigail if Annabelle was dangerous?” Hannibal says slowly, stirring the stove’s contents.

Of course he wouldn’t, but it’s something Will needs to ask. He needs to ensure the safety of his daughter. He isn’t about to lose everything again. *Never again.* “You take risks I don’t always agree with,” Will murmurs, his tone comforting and almost nonchalant. Almost.

“I would never risk her life,” Hannibal says firmly. “She is the teacup I refuse to shatter.”

Ironic, whispers the water in Will’s lungs and the smile on his stomach.

Will stays silent, finishing the coffee and ignoring the stare from Hannibal. He can feel those eyes digging into his temple, desperate for the eye contact Will usually grants him. But Will doesn’t turn to look at him, simply pouring his coffee into a mug - not a teacup, because that would be *too* ironic - and walking away to the living room, where sunlight leaks into the room.

She is the teacup I refuse to shatter. Is she really, though? Hannibal let Will believe that not only was Abigail dead, but that Will himself killed her. So maybe she is the teacup Hannibal refuses to shatter, but is Will safe? Is he destined to be shattered by Hannibal? Broken into a thousand tiny little pieces after the cup that represents him, his mind, has been hurled off a cliff and broken?

Let him break. Let him break to protect Abigail.

Even if it is only in his mind.

Hannibal stays in the kitchen - of course he would, it's not like him to leave his precious creations unattended to - and Will sulks on the couch with only enough room for one person. A quiet and petty little 'fuck off' to Hannibal. Will sighs. Maybe he shouldn't be so petty if he's living with a killer. They made love again this morning, quietly and softly, still shaking off dreams that plague both of their minds. Or maybe they don't plague Hannibal's mind and just Will's. They made love and filled Will with that overwhelming sense of fondness for Hannibal. He was a teacup overflowing with desire and need for the man that shone light on his darkness, and yet that need disappeared the moment after they showered (again) and headed downstairs. Instead, dread filled him and he couldn't shake it.

Hannibal arrives with a plate in hand - a plate filled with fancy ass omelette and meat - and suddenly Will feels sick.

The meat came from their victim last night.

Will shakes his head. No, it didn't. They didn't take anything. They didn't leave evidence.

"Will?" Hannibal whispers, kneeling down after setting the plate on the coffee table besides Will and touching his face with tender fingers. "Abigail is safe, Will. I promise you that. She is safe and will always be safe as long as I am alive, and as long as you are alive. Annabelle won't touch her."

Will shakes his head. “I know that,” he snaps, although his words are slow and nothing more than a murmur. *Abigail is safe because I will protect her. Protect her by being the lure… only I’m being a fairly crappy lure, aren’t I?*

“Then what is it?” Hannibal whispers, brushing the hair out of Will’s eyes. “You are the empath, not I. Sometimes it’s far too easy for you to shut the doors of your mind on me and leave me stranded outside.”

“Stop being poetic,” Will mutters, giving Hannibal a glare, although the glare means eye-contact and that seems to delight Hannibal and only frustrate Will more.

“I’m not. It’s the truth,” Hannibal whispers, shifting so he can sit closely next to Will, thigh pressed up against thigh and shoulders touching their eyes still locked. There is a pause which Will keeps silent, silent as he gazes into dark eyes, but Hannibal fills the silence. “Do you regret it?”

Does he regret it? The kill? The sex? Running with Hannibal to Florence? *Jumping?*

“No,” Will murmurs. He can’t regret it, after all. Not if he wants to keep Abigail alive. He doesn’t regret it. “Are you sure you got all the evidence?” He whispers as he finally looks away.

Hannibal’s brows furrow and a small smile plays on his lips, the ghost of a smirk. “Is that what’s troubling you? Being caught?”

“Did you get it?” Will repeats, not entertaining Hannibal’s chance to mock him.

“Yes,” Hannibal states firmly, no room for argument, his hand inching towards Will’s thigh. “It was a bit sloppy, but they won’t find anything.”

Will nods. “Good.” Good indeed. Good that they are away from the law and therefore Abigail is safe.

“Will,” Hannibal begins slowly, his hand finally coming to rest on Will’s thigh. “Please don’t torment yourself inside there. With whatever it is that is tormenting you. I don’t want to see you suffer. Let me help you.”

Like you’ve helped so much in the past, huh? Will sighs but the sigh is the beginning of his surrender. He can’t keep out Hannibal. Not when Hannibal already has access to his most intimate parts. Mind and body. “The kill…”

Hannibal silence urges Will on, along with the other hand that comes to rest on his lower back, fingers tracing aimless patterns meant to soothe. Designs.

“There was no design,” Will murmurs. “It was some dickhead getting killed and his organs taken. There was no… no *elegance* .”

“And you were desperately trying to grasp for it,” Hannibal confirms. “When you left the lungs.”

Will nods. “I wanted to find some sort of meaning in the kill, but there was none. I didn’t even feel the exhilaration of killing him. I killed him, and that’s it. Yeah I learned the basics of how to remove organs. But that’s it. His death meant nothing”

“You were the one who initiated the hunt, so I assume that there was a design in your mind prior to the kill,” Hannibal says, hand brushing to the spot in between Will’s shoulder blades.

“There was no design! There was only…” Will trails off, his mind flickering to the butchering of Randall Tier and the satisfaction it had. This didn’t have that satisfaction.

“There was a purpose,” Hannibal murmured. “No matter how small, you had chosen to kill him for a reason. Or perhaps it wasn’t him that mattered. Only the fact that there was someone to kill.”

Will turns away.

"Why did you need to kill?" Hannibal presses. "It wasn't for your own satisfaction, not entirely. You slit his throat and that was the end. Your mind was clouded with worry, instead of the clear purpose and righteousness killing is supposed to give you."

There is no answer offered.

"Does it have something to do with what you said?" Hannibal muses, as if to himself. "I think it does. *A hunt is long overdue,* you said. But you had no desire for the hunt, no true desire. So why hunt at all?"

"I thought your narcissistic self would be able to figure that one out," Will snaps, but his voice is tired.

Hannibal pauses at this, cocking his head ever so slightly. "Will. Look at me."

Will refuses and only rolls his eyes. "I'm not a dog-"

"Please," Hannibal whispers, his voice almost desperate. Almost. Because Hannibal is never desperate. He is always… *always* in control.

Will can't win this. Not when he finally let himself… Let himself love the man. So he looks. He turns his head ever so slightly and flicks his eyes up to peer at Hannibal through thick lashes meant to seduce. Hannibal's gaze is calm and tender as he watches the startling blue of Will's eyes.

"You killed for me."

Hannibal doesn't even have the decency to pose it as a question.

“Yes.” Because can Will even deny it? He killed for Hannibal. He gave Hannibal someone to kill. He tried to bring out the beast inside Hannibal, but he failed, didn’t he? He was the one who lost control, not Hannibal. He surrendered, but Hannibal didn’t. “I wanted… *needed* to see you lose yourself in the kill.”

Hannibal presses his forehead to Will’s temple, the gesture comforting and loving. “I don’t lose myself in the kill, Will. Neither are you supposed to.”

Will wants to scoff, but he lets Hannibal continue.

“You are supposed to find yourself in the kill. Find clarity and meaning. Find power.” Hannibal smiles suddenly, a small and soft thing, and his eyes find Will’s again. “We promised to lose ourselves in each other, didn’t we? Surrender into whatever this is we are feeling.”

“Yes,” Will murmurs.

“You were playing the lure,” Hannibal confirms. “Luring me to my doom, perhaps?”

“If I was luring you to your doom you wouldn’t be so smug about it,” Will grunts, giving Hannibal what can only be described as a bitch face.

Hannibal smirks. “You have a point. Then perhaps luring me to prevent your own doom?” Will says nothing, and they both know that Hannibal’s words have hit home. “You don’t need to, Will. There is no need for seducing or games anymore. You have me.” A hand comes up to cradle the side of Will’s neck. “I’m yours.”

“And I assume that I am yours as well?” Will murmurs, unimpressed on the outside.

“Of course,” Hannibal whispers. “We are conjoined, are we not? Two halves of one whole.”

Will groans and thoroughly ruins any mood Hannibal is trying to create. “You are such a drama queen.”

Hannibal smiles. “I will never leave you, Will. You have me. I will protect you. There is no need for lures and desperate clutches for control. You have control. All you have to do is clear your head so you can use it.” The last words are punctuated with a soft kiss to the head. “We’re safe.”

Will kisses him on the lips, his mouth a bruising force.

The kill was sloppy and desperate, because Will wanted to prove his loyalty to Hannibal. He lost control, if only for a little while. He’s in control now. He’s safe.

You are in control, Will. This is your mind, and your story to tell. This is a world of mended teacups and tender love. This is your retelling.

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“Do you think my dad will kill me if I stay here longer?” Abigail murmurs, laying in the sun with a book in hand.

Annabelle smiles fondly. “Your father would never do such a thing. He might kill me, though.”

Abigail snickers. “Maybe. But it’s so nice here…” She rolls over in her chair and closes her book, looking up at Annabelle, who is sketching away in her book. “I like hanging out with you. You’re cool.”

“Thank you,” Annabelle says genuinely, her smile almost hurting on her face as she tries to keep it small. “I think the same of you.”
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“Thanks.” She stretches as she rises from her chair, padding over to where Annabelle sits. “Your drawings remind me of Ha-... of Rafael’s.”

Annabelle watches her carefully, squinting her eyes slightly from the sunlight that streaks around Abigail’s face. “I’m sure I am nowhere near as good as him.”

Abigail shrugs and takes a seat next to her. “But you’re still good. You draw differently to him. You capture people in your art differently.”

“I suppose I do.”

Abigail leaves shortly afterwards Hannibal gives them a call, and Annabelle wishes her well with a kiss on both cheeks.

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“Ms DuBois, you are truly exquisite,” a voice skilled in the arts of boyish seduction whispers.

A breathy laugh followed with a soft moan. “I could say the same, Mr Dimmonds.”

Antony dips a hand down to the curve of Annabelle’s hip and below, chuckling at the shiver that runs through her. “Sensitive, are we?”

“Despite how quickly I agreed to sleep with you, I don’t usually do this,” Annabelle says, pushing back against him and tilting her head back to rest on his shoulder.

“I can tell,” he muses, pushing in and out of her with a quiet groan. “You’re so tight around me. You sure you’re not a virgin?”
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She laughs, the sound vibrating through the pair. “I had a child, so I’m fairly sure I’m not a virgin.”

Antony hums and wraps an arm around her ribs to pull her closer. “It’s quite impressive that you’ve stayed this tight, then.”

Annabelle snorts but then gasps as Antony drags her back and thumbs at her clit. They move so she sits atop him, facing away but her left hand in his and his right hand pleasuring her. With soft murmurs and touches, he encourages her to ride him, rising and falling. He smiles and moans unashamedly at the feeling, digging his head back into the mattress.

“Truly exquisite, Annabelle.”

“For a woman,” she taunts, hair falling across Antony’s face as he kisses her nape, mouthing at the skin there and leaving the faintest of marks.

“Whatever are you implying, m’dear?” He hums, snapping his hips for emphasis.

“You usually prefer men, no?” She says coyly, tilting her head back to see Antony’s look of faux shock that soon morphs into a laugh, the sound rumbling through the pair.

“I have no preference to who I bring to bed, Ms DuBois. My only requirements are that they are willing, of age, and beautiful.” He grins widely as he flips the two of them so Annabelle lays below him, and he deftly turns her over so they face each other before he continues. “And you happen to fit all three.”

“Then why me, if I might ask?” She whispers, curling towards him and granting a small peck on his lips, luring him for more kisses. “Does it somehow arouse you, the fact that I am scarred and missing half a leg?’

“You know I don’t care for those things, Annabelle,” he whispers against her cheek, a smile in his voice. “The scars tell me stories, and it's not those which make your body beautiful or ugly - the way you move, the way you breathe and shudder under my touch,” he runs a hand up her thigh to emphasize his point. “That is what is beautiful.”

Annabelle scoffs and kisses him gently. “That’s not why you picked me. There’s something else.”

He chuckles against her lips. “Is there?” A roll of his hips against hers elicits a soft moan from her throat. “Whatever gave you that impression?”

“You spilled coffee all over yourself when we met, when you met my eyes,” she whispers tauntingly, wicked delight in her eyes. “I reminded you of someone, didn’t I?”

He groans and buries his face in her neck. “Monster.”

She laughs, curling her hands in his hair. “Do tell, Mr Dimmonds. I don’t have all day.”

He hums in agreement. “No, I suppose you don’t. Even such a masochist as I would not be able to stand being teased the entire day without an orgasm. I would die a horrible death.”

“Perhaps it wouldn’t be so painful,” she muses. “Perhaps it would be blissful.”

Antony shrugs slightly before returning his attention to Annabelle’s chest, kissing at the collarbone and lower. “I would rather muse about it all day than find out. I value my orgasms greatly.”

Annabelle giggles and gasps softly as Antony kisses down and down her chest, pulling out as he does so. “What are you doing, you devilish man?”

“Distracting you and busying my mouth so you never discover why I decided to sleep with you,” he answers promptly, smirking against her skin.

“Is it truly so embarrassing, the reason?” She asks. “Would I be so horribly offended?”

“Perhaps not,” he whispers against her stomach. “But if I must die at your hand, I would prefer being smothered by these beautiful thighs than being strangled. Much sexier.”

“Do you want me to tell you why I let myself sleep with you, first, to provide you with comfort?” Annabelle asks, arching into Antony’s mouth and weaving a hand into his hair.

He hums. “Do go on.”

She smiles and drags over a pillow to lean on before continuing. “You’re willing. Of age. And beautiful.”

He whispers a small ‘damn you’ before latching onto her clit and sucking harshly.

“Oh fuck,” she groans, twisting her hand in his hair and dropping her head back like a wilting flower. “You and your damned tongue.”

She feels the smirk against her skin as he begins to lap at her folds, his eyes flicking up to hers and winking. Annabelle promptly looks away, eyes focusing on the ceiling and his hair, curling in her hand. He pointed this out about her within the hour they met: she hates eye contact. Refuses to meet his eyes for more than two seconds. He then quickly vowed to bring her to orgasm while staring deeply into the windows of her soul.

He pleasures her for a while - she can’t be bothered to measure exactly how long she’s stuck in this blissful cage - his hand rising and falling on her thighs and coming to rest on the stump of her left knee, thumbing at the scars there and dead nerves. It feel strange, for Antony to touch her there, but she’s long grown out of the painful memories her leg brought

her. It's just a leg, or half of it, more of. Eventually, after Annabelle is on the verge of giving up and begging, he raises and kisses up her chest again.

"I picked you because you remind me of someone," he whispers latching onto her left breast.

"See? Now, why was that so mortifying for you to admit?" She asks, both hands in his hair.

"Because," he says after giving her breast a last kiss. "That someone is a man."

There is a small pause before Annabelle is laughing, all teeth as she grins down at Antony. "And let me guess, you never had the honor of fucking him?"

He nods mournfully and buries his head in her neck. "He was *married.* And not to a woman. I could seduce him if he was married to a woman. But he was married to another man, and not just any man, a beautiful creature with dark curls and the ocean trapped in his eyes. I didn't want to sleep with that man anymore, I wanted to sleep with the man *and* his god of a husband."

Annabelle pets Antony's head, comforting his exaggerated little moans of remorse.

"God, I wanted both of them to fuck me. At the same time," Antony breathes.

"You want me to fuck you with a strap-on?" Annabelle murmurs, inching down so his cock brushes against the wetness on her thighs. "Comfort you and allow you to imagine this man to be the one doing it?"

"Don't tempt me," he hisses before sucking on her jaw, snapping his hips forward and into Annabelle in a fluid, well practiced motion.

"Tell me about the man," she whispers. "Was he tall?"

“A giant,” Antony gasps. “Tall, strong, lean, *blonde* , and he radiated this aura of… power, I swear. He had such dark eyes, sharp, sharp cheekbones, oh and his *lips*... God, I need to write some poetry about his lips. Permanently puckered and thin, forming beautiful French in a deep, sultry voice…”

“And you wanted him to fuck you?” She whispers, moaning softly at the way Antony’s hips rolled. As much as she hates to admit it, he’s good at this game. At the seduction and the sex and the *talking.* God, some people might hit him for how much he talks.

“I wouldn’t mind being fucked by him as I fucked you. It would be the ultimate fantasy, mercy, it really would.”

“Care to tell me his name?” Annabelle muses, her voice drawn tight as her orgasm approaches.

“Raphael, although I’m half convinced he was lying to me about his name,” Antony mutters, his voice morphing into vague obscene sounds rather than proper words and sentences.

Antony came first, spilling into the condom before fumbling with a hand to help Annabelle through her own orgasm. After they both sated themselves, they were a heap of sex and sweat and quiet kisses, utterly helpless to do anything else but lay there together.

“What if I told you I knew where this Rafaelis?” Annabelle murmurs after a few moments, minutes, hours of kisses.

Antony laughs and nuzzles against her neck. “I’d probably be ready for round two, if I’m honest.”

Annabelle groans as she smacks him lightly on the shoulder. “Are you that thirsty for the man?”

“Yes, and I am unashamed of it,” Antony replies instantly.

“Only because you have no shame,” she mutters, slowly detaching herself from his arms.

“You’re not wrong,” he muses as he shuffles away from her and flops onto the side of the bed. “But what is this about knowing where my beautiful Rafaelis?”

She’s silent as she rummages for her clothing and prosthetic leg on the floor, pulling on her panties when she can stand. If she tells Antony where Hannibal is, he’d be marked with a timer. His life would have Hannbal’s expiration stamp on it and he would never leave Florence alive.

But Antony buys her some time while also acting as a catalyst. He’d die, so Hannabil’s hand would be forced, and Annabelle could reveal herself. Be there to help Hannibal dispose of the body.

“He’s here,” she whispers, almost seductively. “In Florence.”

Antony stares at her for a moment before replying. “You’re lying to me. Taunting my fleshly desires.”

She merely stares at him.

“He’s here?” He whispers, almost in awe, before suddenly clambering out of bed and scrambling towards her with childish glee. “I want to know where he works so I can ‘accidentally’ stumble across him and begin my seduction.”

She laughs quietly. “You’re hopeless.”

“Not anymore, my dear!” He says, kissing her cheek swiftly as he walks to the kitchen - naked. “I am now hopeful!”

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It doesn't take long before Antony finds Hannibal - even if only from very vague clues from Annabelle - and the day he does, he immediately runs back to Annabelle in excitement, grinning ear to ear like a child.

"I assume you found him?" She asks when Antony plops down onto the chair across from her at the little cafe they usually meet.

"That implies that I was looking for him," Antony begins, still smiling.

"You were," Annabelle needlessly reminds him.

"Such a joykill, Annabelle," he drawls. "No. I didn't find him. I stumbled across him while wandering close to the river."

"And did you manage to actually speak to him?" Annabelle muses, sipping at her coffee. "Or did you stare like a hopeless girl?"

"Oh spare me, darling. I only managed to catch a glimpse of him as he was taking a walk with his husband," he says, grinning into the rim of his cup. "They weren't holding hands or doing anything overly fond, but their shoulders were close and Rafael looked at his husband with the most fond expression I have ever seen."

"You're hopeless," Annabelle says, but she smiles nonetheless.

"I am *happy* , darling. Happy." He grins even wider - somehow - and sighs as he looks to the sky. A sky that is seemingly forever blue and beautiful. "Rafael shall soon be in my clutches once again. Or I in his." The last part is added as a quiet afterthought, and Annabelle has to
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agree. Antony is wandering - more of throwing himself - into the lair of a monster that has no intention of letting him go alive.

“When will you seek him out again?” Annabelle asks.

Antony’s smile settles down into something a little more subtle, but it’s still there. “I don’t know. Whenever I have the time and energy, I suppose.”

“When your hand and I become too unsatisfactory for you?”

Antony nearly spits out his drink - Annabelle shamelessly timed her comment - and gives her a falsely horrified expression. “You of all people should know that I have more than you and my hand at my disposal. There’s quite a few things to get through before I have to throw myself at Rafael and Elio.”

Annabelle smirks, ignoring the fact that Antony now knows Will’s alias. “Whatever you say, poet.”

He gives her a tired eye roll before leaning forward, hands clasped underneath his chin and elbows on the table. “But, since I have so much at my disposal, do you want to help me run my supply dry? Quicken the eventual meeting between Rafael and I?”

Annabelle gives him an unimpressed stare, pinning him there as he gives her the most undignified puppy-eyes. “What if I can’t?”

He narrows his eyes at her. “Expand.”

“Female hormones do run on a cycle, you know. We’re not available all times of the month,” she says innocently, sipping her coffee a moment after.

He sighs softly and pins her with a gaze of his own. “We both know your period was a little over a week ago,” he says bluntly. “So, unless your imaginary job calls for you, you’ve got no excuse.”

“No excuse for not fucking you?” She says, raising her brows. “And my job is much more real than yours, poet.”

He scoffs. “Say what you will, but you can’t run from me, darling.”

“But what if I’m not willing? Therefore not fulfilling your requirements?”

He groans and throws his head back. “Just let me make love to you, you annoying little minx.”

She grins at him, all teeth. “If you insist.”

“I have been insisting!”

She throws her head back and laughs, the sound too loud on her ears but it urges Antony into a grin. She looks at him childishly, her chin tucked to her chest and her bottom lip in between her teeth. Antony pokes her with the tip of his shoe, wiggling his eyebrows at her. He truly has no shame.

They have sex later that evening, when the sun sets and casts rich shadows throughout the room and across their bodies. Antony moves like youth above her, his laugh and his libido most certainly dripping with youth. She ducks her head at the words he whispers into her skin - foolish promises and playful comments, woven into horrible poetry - clutching at his arms and back as he moved inside and around her.

“You’re beautiful,” he whispers when the sun has set and his overeager dick finally sated.

“Even more beautiful than Rafael?” She whispers in return, and he whacks her arm lightly, no venom involved.

“Is it foolish, to lust after such a god like him?” He muses into the darkness, his hand inching towards hers.

“Do you believe it is?”

He scoffs lightly. “Of course. Sex and lust are usually foolish. Beautiful and amazing, but foolish. It means nothing, usually just a mask for something else.”

“A mask for what?” She asks, propping herself onto one elbow and looking at the shadow of his body.

“Power. Love. Violence. It varies,” he says.

“What are you masking in your lust for me?” She whispers into his ear, leaning down and tickling his skin with her hair.

He smiles as he looks at her - she can barely pick out the creases in his skin the shadows dip into - and replies, “Nothing. I desired you, and you desired me, so I found no reason as to why we couldn’t enjoy ourselves.”

“So simple,” she murmurs. “If only life was like that.” *If only I wasn’t hiding death behind my lust for you.*

“If only,” he murmurs back, turning his head back to the ceiling.

She pauses in silence, thinking of Hannibal, of the death that follows him, and of Abigail - Mischa. “I can introduce you to Rafael.”

He turns his head back to her. “Why would you do that?”

Because I need Hannibal to kill you . But she doesn't say that. “Because you desire him, and he could desire you.” Just not in the same way.

“He already has a beautiful husband.”

She smiles a soft smile, one that hides a certain malice and regret. “Perhaps Rafael would enjoying sharing you with his husband, spread out on their dinner table like a feast. You do know that Rafael cooks?” The last part is added with a cruel glint in her eyes, but Antony mistakes it for something else.

Antony groans and grinds the heels of his hands into his eyes. “You will be the death of me, Annabelle.”

Not quite. “Maybe. But you are willingly walking into your death, Antony.”

He huffs out a laugh. “You have a point.”

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“Sorry for being late, I was with a friend,” Procel says as she settles in front of her computer screen, watching Alana on the screen.

“A friend?” Alana asks, her head tilted ever so slightly to the left and her eyebrows furrowing in worry.

“Believe it or not, I can actually have those.”
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Alana waits for Procel to further explain.

Procel sighs, smiling at Alana's cold gaze that doesn't hide the worry in her expression.

"He came across Hannibal in Paris, and so I thought it would be good to get on his side to sneak up on Hannibal," Procel explains.

Alana nods. "Have you found him? Hannibal?"

Procel scoffs. "Ye of little faith, Alana. I found him a couple weeks ago."

"And you haven't said anything?" Alana says, her voice rising slightly higher, inching towards anger.

"There was no need to. I met the man, had dinner with him, and now I'm keeping him happy and unsuspecting here."

"... you had dinner with him?" Alana asks, the confusion obvious in her eyes. "Why?"

"It would have been rude to decline," Procel deadpans. "And he didn't feed me human remains. There hasn't been a single murder with that amount of butchery involved."

"You have to be careful, Procel. Why didn't you call Jack when you found Hannibal? Or me?"

Procel scoffs. *Because I didn't want you to find him.* "If I told you or Jack, the hounds would be released recklessly and Hannibal would slip through your fingers again. We need to keep him unsuspecting, and you want to save Will and Abigail. I'm trying to ensure that they will be safe when the time comes to capture Hannibal."

Alana stills and looks down, writing hands that are not seen by the camera. “We can’t keep dragging this out. We have to act quickly.”

“We will,” Procel promises. “Just let me lay my traps. Then I’ll call Uncle Jack and Hannibal will be locked up in a padded room, subject to Chilton’s prodding fingers.”

Alana seems almost content. “Just… be careful. This is Hannibal Lecter.”

Procel smiles. “I know. I’ll be fine.”

The call ends shortly after, and Procel collapses on her bed. Tomorrow, she’ll introduce Antony to Hannibal, and then they await his death.

Chapter End Notes

If you’ve read this far, please leave a comment! Doesn’t matter how nice or long! Just say something so I know that there are people reading this disaster of a fic!

The Lives and Deaths of Lecter

Chapter Summary

The Lecter family backstory.

Chapter Notes

Ha! An update? That isn't after five months? Amazing. I hope ya'll like this chapter I nearly died writing this,

I'm definitely inspired by a whole bunch of other fics that talk about Hannibal's backstory, but I've kinda taken it into my own hands. It's most definitely severely historically inaccurate. I will face the consequences of my actions.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Hannibal sits at the table, his hand curled around a warm cup of coffee. He stares out the window, watching the sunlight trickle through the city. Will sits in the other room, talking softly with Abigail. What feels like a hundred miles away, Annabelle sits in her own apartment, her own hands clutching the plastic and metal material making her leg. Her eyes are trained on the same sun as Hannibal, remembering what it felt like to burn. Memories flash through their minds, not the same memories, not the same emotions, but they are from the same story. The story of a monster, a devil, a hellish creature.

Were you there when he turned from the teat and to the world?

"Hannibal," Annabelle whispers softly, the sound reaching no one. Simply murmuring his name for the sake of hearing it on her lips.

Hannibal does not whisper a reply - why would he? Instead he thinks on her, on her name, on her life, and on her death.

How did your sister taste?

Like the sweetest nectar from hell, he thinks to himself, taking a sip of his coffee and smiling at Will who settles next to him, thigh pressed flush against Hannibal's, and a smile of his own on his lips.

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Some time ago.

Mischa launches herself down the hallway, her small feet whispering against the carpet. Mother and father are sleeping, and the nanny is on the other side of the estate. No one can hear her run down the hall, not even the dogs. Thunder crashes above the ceiling, hammering into her ears and she staggers in the hallway, holding her hands over her ears in a desperate attempt to silence the noise.

She bursts into a room, the heavy door groaning under her weight and she falls onto the carpeted floor.

"Hannibal!" She whispers loudly.

A small head lifts itself off the pillow, intelligent eyes watching Mischa on the floor.

"Mischa?"

She whimpers softly as another strike of thunder bursts over their heads, and she promptly throws herself into Hannibal's arms the moment he opens them for her. She burrows deeper into his nest of blankets, snuggling into the warmth it holds. His arms loop around her, tucking her head beneath his chin as he whispers comforting words to her.

"Your safe, Mischa. I've got you." His voice is young but it carries so much weight, burying itself into Mischa's bones.
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She can only nod.

Thunder crackles through the clouds, lightning sparkling across the sky and illuminating golden curls and deep maroon eyes. She shudders with each sound, but the arms around her make her feel secure, safe from the flashes of lightning. Safe as she will ever be.

“Hannibal?” She whispers, arching her head up to look at him.

“Yes?”

Her hands are clutching to his shirt, wrinkling the fabric and staining them with the sweat from her palms. He’s looking at her with expecting eyes, waiting for the words that are trying to force themselves through Mischa’s throat.

“What happens when I grow up?” She mutters, burrowing into his chest again. She’s six, right now, but what happens when she turns eight and her parents demand her to grow up? When the lighting should do no more to scare her than their hounds?

“What do you mean?”

“You know… when I’m too old to be scared of thunderstorms.”

He chuckles softly against her, his cheek on her head. He understands her thoughts immediately, kissing the top of her head. “You can still come to me, when you’re scared.”

“Even when I’m bigger?” She asks softly, her eyes screwed shut against her brother’s shirt.

“Forever, Mischa,” he whispers, petting her hair and moving it away from her round cheeks. “I will always be here to protect you, no matter what.” The promise goes deeper than his little

Mischa can realize.

She nods hurriedly and shifts in his arms, curling against his chest and relaxing herself in the warmth of her brother.

“Love you, Hannibal,” she murmurs before committing herself to sleep.

“I love you too, Mischa.”

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Mother and father refuse to tell Mischa anything about the chaos outside their home. They tell Hannibal in hushed whispers and cold instructions, but never Mischa. *She’s too young,* they would say. *She wouldn’t understand.*

“Will you tell me, Hannibal?” Mischa asks one night, when the thunder screams outside the windows again, and her body enveloped in Hannibal’s warmth.

“About why mother and father are so worried?”

She nods.

He sighs and holds her a little tighter. “Why do you want to know?”

“I feel so helpless,” she admits. “I want to help, I want to know things, I’m not that little.” She’s eight now, and even if her parents have now demanded her to act less childish and more like her brother, she still runs to him every time the thunder booms.
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“How could you help?” Hannibal whispers, brushing blonde curls out of Mischa’s eyes. “You are still young, and even if you knew, what could you do?”

She fidgets and squirms in his arms. “I don’t know, but I could do something! I could try to help move everything in the house, and hide all of mother’s jewelry. I heard you guys talking about that…”

He laughs quietly, the thunder echoing it. The shadows hide his face, but Mischa isn’t scared. Not of Hannibal. Hannibal is safe.

“You are helping,” he says slowly, kindly. “Mother and father are worrying so much over everything, and so by not worrying, you’re bringing more happiness into their lives.”

She snorts and pokes at his chest. “But I can do more!”

“You don’t need to,” he says, almost sternly. Mischa silences herself immediately. “I told you that I am always here for you, I will always protect you. We are protecting you. You don’t need to know, because I will take care of things for you. Nothing is going to happen to you. It would be pointless worrying about things that would never occur.”

She pouts and turns her face to the pillow. “It’s not fair.” Her words are muffled by the pillow. “Even Chiyoh knows more than me. And she’s a servant!”

“She’s older,” Hannibal reminds her.

“Pft, don’t act like you’re so much older, Hannibal.” She glares at him, her own glare echoed by a flash of white across the room. “You’re only ten.”

He smiles, his crooked teeth almost shimmering in the night. “Two whole years older than you, Mischa.”

“Still not fair.”

Mischa eventually finds out that it’s a war, outside the estate. People - she can’t even find out which people - are fighting, and there’s so many of them. Another country is trying to take over their country, and people are becoming scared. Hannibal tells her that she cannot be scared, because enough people are already terrified.

“But why are they scared?” She asks. “What could happen?”

Hannibal’s eyes darken. “Bad things, Mischa. They could hurt you.”

She looks down, still confused. Her brother’s answer wasn’t much of an answer, because if bad things could happen, then she should be worried.

“But you want me to not be scared? If people are out there, hurting other people, then that means they could hurt us! They could hurt you!” She almost yells, stomping her foot on the ground and glaring at Hannibal.

“They have every reason to be scared,” Hannibal whispers lowly, looking down at the ground next to Mischa’s feet. “They aren’t safe.”

She sputters and opens her mouth to speak, but Hannibal cuts her off sharply. “You are safe.”

Mischa can only gawk at him as her brain works through the scenarios - the only ones she could know at this age. “Is it because we live in the estate? Because we have mother and father to protect us?”

“No,” Hannibal says too calmly. “It’s because you have me.”

She feels touched, protected and safe - like the thunderous nights she spends encased in Hannibal’s warmth and love - but then suddenly confused. “You’re… you’re still a kid,

though! You're a little older, but not by much. Mother and father can't do anything with the people fighting, so how come you can do something?"

"I never said I could do anything to stop the fighting," Hannibal says. "I said I can protect you. I can't protect everyone - I don't want to - but I can protect you. Nothing - no one, will hurt you, Mischa." His eyes are hard, and Mischa suddenly understands why some of the adults are scared of Hannibal. His eyes look like the eyes of a grown up. Cold, intelligent, and strong. Too strong.

"Will you protect mother and father?" She asks quietly, realizing her hands are shaking.

Hannibal catches the small movements in her hands at the same time she does, and he brings her to his chest, holding her tightly. His hands run up and down her back, tracing the bones of her spine.

"I can't protect them," he whispers into her hair. "I can't. So I won't. If something happens, I can only protect you."

"Then who will protect them?" Her voice feels small and weak. She feels so small in Hannibal's arms.

There is a pause.

"They will protect each other," Hannibal says eventually.

Why do the words feel like a lie?

Mischa knows that her brother is dangerous. She knows why the adults in the house are either terrified or caring of her brother. He sees so much, and watches people with dark eyes - almost red, like a vampire - and seems to be in control of everything. He won't interact with people he doesn't like - something Mischa is better with, handling other people and getting them to like her - and he refuses to bow down to others. Normally, you'd expect father to

smack some sense into him, but even father was scared of Hannibal. Hannibal knew what he was doing, knew the consequences, and still doesn't care.

Hannibal was scary.

He had cut up one of the hounds when he was younger - Mischa barely remembered the incident other than the red that was everywhere - claiming to want to know how it worked. What its heart felt like when it beat.

He has a garden full of snails, for the fireflies to feed on. In the darkness, when the the sky was calm and Hannibal's warmth around her, the garden was beautiful. Soft, golden lights flickers around the fountain and the trees, and she felt like she was in a fairytale. But in the day, when the sun revealed the mountain of snails crawling about and the carcasses of their half eaten bodies, Mischa was horrified. Hannibal was curious and almost delighted by the garden, night and day, carefully tending to it.

So why isn't Mischa scared?

She's scared of his actions, of what he could do to others, what he *did* do to others, but she never feels in danger around Hannibal. Hannibal will protect her. He will not let anything harm her. Nothing will hurt her.

Hannibal loves her.

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The estate is slowly eaten away.

The paintings go first, then the jewelry. Cloths follow, along with carpets, couches, tapestry, dresses, servants, horses, hounds, curtains, blankets, all of it goes. Most of it is given to the other members of the village, and the rest to the strange men on the doorstep.
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Hannibal is furious. He says that they shouldn't care about the villagers, and certainly not the men at the door. He says that they made this wealth for themselves, that the others didn't deserve it, and for the first time in years - perhaps in Mischa's memory - father yells at Hannibal. He yells, barking cruel words at Hannibal, and for the first time in Mischa's memory, Hannibal has nothing to say in return. Usually, even if he didn't speak, Mischa could see that twinkle in his eyes that revealed his clever words hiding inside his skull. But this time, there was no twinkle, there was no smirk, no laugh, no cry, no demand, nothing. Hannibal simply looks at his father, then turns and walks away. Father yells at him to come back, to answer, to apologize for his actions, but Hannibal keeps walking.

Mischa follows as soon as her father is out of sight, her quickly growing legs sprinting after her brother.

"Hannibal!" She shouts, bursting into his room, the door groaning under her hands. Hannibal isn't in his room, the cold light seeping in and casting pale shadows on the floor.

She turns away, running down the hall to the study. To the library. To the kitchen. The garden. The pond. The snail garden. Nothing. She stands in the middle of their grounds, panting, her lungs heaving under her ribs as she fights for air. She thinks and thinks for where Hannibal could be, her mind snarling with an intelligence she rarely reveals or relies on. Her thoughts wander through the halls of their home - not the empty carcass it is now, but what it once was, when it was filled with warmth and the smiles of her brother. Her thoughts take her through the gardens and into the forest, following a narrow trail to the river.

Her footsteps follow her mind's path, leading her down a narrow and twisting path through the woods. The gnarled roots rise and fall under her feet, and the woods welcome her with open arms and wide claws. She shivers in fear - fear of the unknown, of the dangers that lurk within the forest, but her brother is within these woods. He is one of the creatures hiding in the darkness.

She doesn't like this section of the forest. She never has. It's filled with too much darkness and crooked smiles on the trunks of trees, and she can't find comfort in the trees' embrace. The air turns cold around her, and she thinks back to the monster Hannibal would tell her about in the dead of night. The wendigo creeps into her mind, blood running down its thin lips and the black skin stretching over protruding bones.

Are you scared?

She keeps pushing forward through the woods, daring to call out for Hannibal. He always follows the same path, saying that he has no need to explore the woods. Merely to stand within it.

Are you scared of the wendigo lurking in the shadows?

Mischa shakes her head at the voice, and pushes forward. She's here for Hannibal. The monsters around her, they will not harm her. She is not their prey. She is under Hannibal's protection.

"Hannibal!" She calls again, wrapping her arms around herself. "Hannibal, come out, please!"

Silence responds.

"Hannibal!" She shouts, the word burning her throat. Tears rise in her eyes as the horror fills her.

What if he ran away? What if he was so done with the soldiers and the empty house that he left? That he ran away in a fit of anger, searching for calm, and never returning? What if he did return? Return only to find you and mother and father dead in the ice, their blood red against the snow?

Her world is slowly turning to dust, with all this fighting. Her home is being eaten alive, carved of all the things that made it her home. The warmth of the carpets and the smiles of the paintings, they are all being torn away. Mother and father rarely have time to even look at Hannibal and her, and all of the servants in the house disappeared and abandoned them as well. Even Chiyoh left to live with one of Mischa's aunts. The only thing she has left is Hannibal.

Would he leave you? Save his own skin?

She stumbles along the path, the darkness suffocating her. He has always been there for her, but then again, so has the rest of her home. What if this war took away Hannibal as well? What if he got so mad that he left her? That he couldn't take it anymore and ran away to the forest, living off of the animals in the woods?

"Hannibal!" Her voice is older, more desperate, more wounded. The darkness is not Mischa's friend, but neither is it her enemy. She walks along the path with fear in her heart, but it is not of the shadows lurking behind crooked trees and the soft chittering of animals. It is of being abandoned by the most dangerous creature in these woods. Being abandoned by Hannibal.

But suddenly, he's there, standing and waiting for her.

He wouldn't leave you. Never you.

He's standing in the middle of the path, his hands fists at his sides as he lifts his head to the canopy of the woods. She sees his chest rising and falling, and the way the darkness welcomes him.

"Hannibal?" She whispers, stopping as well, looking at him and restraining the arm that longs to reach out for him.

I want you to know exactly where I am. That way, you can always find me.

He turns, eyes finding her. Wordlessly, he reaches his hand out.

Come to me, Mischa.

She runs forward, slamming into his chest as her own stutters for air.

“Don’t do that!” She yells into his shirt, her voice muffled by the fabric. “Don’t leave me!”

He is silent for a moment as his arms wrap around her slowly, holding her tightly against his chest.

“I’m sorry,” he whispers, as if realizing the desperation in Mischa’s voice. “I won’t do it again.”

“If you’re going to run,” she whispers angrily, her tears staining his shirt. “Run away with me. Take me with you. Don’t leave me.”

He kisses the top of her head. “I won’t leave you, Mischa,” he whispers. “You shall never part from me.”

She sobs into his shirt, clutching desperately onto him. “You can’t leave me. Not like Chiyoh, not like mother, not like father, not like the nanny, not like anything else in our life! You cannot leave me!”

He holds her tighter. “I will never leave you, Mischa,” he whispers kindly into her hair. “I’m sorry that I scared you. I merely needed to clear my head.”

“Well then tell me that!” She snaps into his chest, refusing to meet his eyes. “Don’t just run away without saying anything!”

“I’m sorry,” he says again. “I won’t do it again.”

He holds her for a while, hands petting her head gently, like placating a startled animal. Her breathing becomes slower as she matches his, her heartbeat steadying. The darkness looms around them, but it is no danger to either of them. Hannibal is in control here. And Mischa is his to protect.

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“One day, when the fighting stops, I’ll give you everything,” Hannibal whispers into Mischa’s hair one night, a week after the incident in the forest. The estate has only become barer, but they can do nothing. Mischa sleeps with Hannibal regularly, now, the beds so much more comforting when there is a body to share heat with.

She eyes him in the darkness, watching his twinkling eyes. “Everything?”

“Everything,” he confirms. “I will give you riches, jewels, dresses made of the finest silk. You will witness the opera weekly as you dine with the richest people of the city, sipping champagne from a flute.” His hands rest on her back, between her shoulder blades. “Your house will be made of stone but adorned with thick carpets and furs, a roaring fireplace amidst the room. The windows will stretch to the ceiling, taller than five men standing on each other’s shoulders.”

“We used to have that,” Mischa whispers quietly.

Hannibal nods. “And you will have it again. I promise you.”

She smiles. “Okay.”

Did you keep it, truly, Hannibal? Did you give her everything you said you would?

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Mother falls ill. Her coughs fill the hallways - dry, heaving things that are filled with cruelty. Mischa doesn’t see the blood, but Hannibal does. He sees the redness in the napkins and the redness on the bedsheets and the redness on the floor. He knows his mother is dying. She is withering away and there is nothing anyone can do. Medicine cannot come to the rescue, not

when the medicine is days away and no one dares travel that far anymore. Not for something as simple as medicine.

Mischa is worried for her mother, Hannibal can see that. Her small hands bunch the cloths of her skirt into wrinkles, her eyes heavy and sad when she hears mother coughing. Hannibal doesn't try to tell her that mother will get better, that it will pass, that things will get better. Things are getting worse and they aren't going to get better. Mother's death… it's only a matter of time. Everyone's death is only a matter of time. Hannibal wonders if he should save his mother in the only way he knows how. Ending the pain. Saving her from this cruel world and granting her peace and quiet.

He lets the sickness consume her slowly.

She is sick, and she is weak. It's not his fault this is how it is. He can't kill mother without father finding out, and only more problems would arise if a murder occurred within their home. So he lets his mother burn slowly, from the inside out. Her coughs fall flat on his ears, and he focuses on what little study he can do and helping his father. The days are filled with work, and the nights are filled with Mischa's warmth.

In the twilight moments, he's there, in the corner of his mother's room, watching the blood fall from her lips. The redness coating her chin and the dried flakes of life on her fingers. She looks like she's in pain, terrible pain, and Hannibal wonders what it feels like. Knives against her throat, perhaps? Sand in her lungs?

He wonders how long she will continue to cling onto life. How long her body will disobey her mind's wishes. She wants to die, Hannibal can see it. She doesn't want to keep living like this. What's the point? She's not there for her children, her husband, or some other lover. Life has nothing to offer her, and death must look so appealing.

"Just die already," he whispers under his breath one day, when she is sleeping fitfully but deeply. She won't hear him. "Just die." The words feel strange on his tongue, but he likes the way it makes him feel. Powerful. Above her. He won't mourn when she's gone. What has she ever done for Hannibal other than bringing him into this hell?

Mischa will mourn. She will cry, scream into his chest, and ask why mother had to die. Hannibal will hold her, tell her that mother is free from the pain now, and that the world will

keep moving. Mischa will cry, but she will see reason.

Mother dies a month after she gets sick, and Mischa cries. Father mourns quietly, but Hannibal knows that he's relieved. One less mouth to feed.

Hannibal doesn't bother looking at the corpse of his mother.

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"Mischa," Hannibal whispers one night, another night, a night long after the death of their mother. He's standing over the bed, shaking his sister awake.

"Hannibal?" She murmurs, rubbing the sleep from her eyes. "What's going on?"

He shakes his head. "You have to wake up. Put on some warm clothes. Quickly."

She shakes as she gets out of bed, her muscles quivering as she stretches. "What's going on?" She repeats. "What time is it?"

"Early," Hannibal murmurs in reply, bringing Mischa her shoes. "Quickly. Put them on."

She slides on trousers and her shirt, layering up with a sweater and jacket while fumbling to put her feet through her socks. "Is father awake?" She asks.

Hannibal stills for a moment, a fleeting moment that Mischa doesn't notice, and then continues. "No. But we must go."

"Why?"
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“I will explain as we leave.”

Mishca pouts and stares at Hannibal. “You better.”

“I will. I promise.”

Clothes are practically thrown onto Mischa, and she feels like a walking closet by the time Hannibal deems her ready for travel. He gives her a small bag which she slings over her shoulder, and after he dons a much larger, heavier bag, he takes her hand and leads her through the house. They walk quickly and silently through their home, the halls cold and unwelcoming in the darkness, but Mischa wills herself to not be scared. She is with Hannibal. She is safe. There are no monsters which can harm her here.

Hannibal leads them out of the building, shutting the heavy wooden doors behind them.

“Hannibal?” Mischa whispers, her voice barely rising above the wind. “Where are we going?’

“Away,” Hannibal angers simply. “We cannot stay here.” With those words, her takes her hand and pulls her roughly from the door.

Mischa yanks her hand from Hannibal’s and plants her feet firmly in place. “But what about father?” She demands. “Are we leaving him?”

Hannibal’s face shows no emotion. “He’s dead, Mischa.”

She stares at him. The words reach her mind but they don’t seem to touch to heart. Or maybe her heart canno’t process it. “What?” She whispers. “What do you mean he’s—”

“He’s dead, Mischa,” Hannibal repeats. “I meant exactly what I said.”

She continues to stare at him, her eyes prickling from the cold wind. “But he wasn’t sick,” she whispers. “He wasn’t sick like mother.”

Hannibal sighs. “No, he wasn’t.”

“So what happened?” She demands, her voice growing angry. It’s unlike Hannibal to not explain things. To not just tell her the blunt truth. Why is he hiding answers? Why won’t he answer?

“He was killed, Mischa,” Hannibal snaps, bitterness entering his tone. “Men came in the dead of the night and they killed him and stole everything. The only reason why they didn’t kill us because they thought father lived alone in the remains of his wealth.”

Mischa takes a step backwards, a step towards her home and the body of her father.

“We’re leaving so the men do not come back to discover us and kill us.”

“Did you see the men?” Mischa asks, her hands clutched together at her chest, her voice small.

“Yes,” Hannibal says.

They are both silent for a few moments as Mischa takes in the information. As her mind tries to picture the body of their father. How did they do it? Did they slit his throat? Stab his chest? Strangle him? Behead him? Bleed him to death? Bash his head in? What did Hannibal do? Did he see them kill father? Did he see the blood on their hands? Did he try to stop them? Was he scared?

Hannibal wouldn’t be scared.

“What did you do?” She whispers, her eyes on the floor, on the stone, on the snow covering the snow.

Hannibal is silent.

“What did you do? When you saw…” when you say the corpse of our father?

He still doesn’t speak.

“Did you fight them?” She whispers. She can see it, Hannibal lurking in the dark corners as he watches them kill father. As he watches the blood spill from father’s lips. He would lurk there, wait for a moment, the right moment, and then he would pounce.

Did you kill them?

“Fight seems like an improper way to describe what happened,” Hannibal says quietly, not shyly, but softly, as if he was trying to be kind to Mischa and lessen the blow.

“Did you kill them?” She whispers. She refuses to meet her brother’s eyes, the gaze which she can feel burning her skin.

“Yes.”

A sharp laugh breaks out of her throat, bubbling out like a choke.

Blood on his hands, on his lips, on his shirt. Bloodlust in his eyes, in his voice, in his heart.

Good.

But is it his blood on his hands, on his lips, on his shirt? Or is it theirs?

“Are you hurt?” She whispers, her frame shaking.

Hannibal seems to be suprised by her question, because he pauses before answering her.

“No. They nicked my throat but it’s shallow.”

She nods.

Hannibal stretches out a hand, and she takes it, and lets him lead her away.

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They travel quite quickly, and Hannibal leads them to where Chiyoh was sent. An aunt, a distant friend, a distant family member. The snow is cold on their skin and kisses them with blue lips, but Hannibal moves them quickly. He takes Mischa’s bag when she tires, and pulls her along when her feet tire. She’s never walked so much in her entire life. Hannibal sometimes manages to get a ride on the back of a wagon - never a car - but it’s rare. They sleep in the woods, in a kind stranger’s house, in a barn, anywhere. Hannibal brought the small sum of wealth left in the house - mostly the jewelry father couldn’t bear to sell - and it helps them buy food and a warm place to sleep.

Mischa falls ill two weeks into traveling.

Hannibal makes her walk through the coughing and the snot running down her nose, giving her handkerchiefs to clean herself, but it only gets worse. The sickness drags the strength out of Mischa, and it burns in her bones to move. Hannibal is forced to stop when Mischa faints.
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He finds them a small lodge shared with various travelers, and there is not much privacy, but there is warmth and some food. He tucks Mischa into the warmest corner in the room, gives her all of his food, and bargains with others with the small amount of money he has left.

It's all pointless in the end.

Mischa doesn't get better, and if anything, she gets worse. Blood taints the handkerchiefs Hannibal gives her, and her round cheeks have hollowed out. For the first time in years, Hannibal cries. As Mischa clings to life, death clings to her bones. He does what he can, what he could, what he could think of. But what can he do? She won't get better. She won't heal unless a doctor, a proper doctor, treats her.

Hannibal itches with the need to hurt someone. To witness blood that doesn't being to his sister.

The opportunity arises in all of the wrong ways.

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At some point, Mischa falls into a trance of pain and blood and agony. She doesn't know how long she stays in this trance. She feels brief touches of warmth against her cheeks and forehead, a soft voice against in her ear. She remembers whispering Hannibal's name, the word scratching her throat and coaxing blood past her lips. Warmth fills her mouth when she coughs and when she drinks and eats, and after so long, she starts being unable to recognize which is which. Is it blood or is it food? Life or death?

At some point in her trance, the screaming starts.

Voices, horrible voices, reach her ears and suddenly pain fills her. She has been living with pain in her lungs and bones, but this was different. This was the burn of her skin breaking, her muscles breaking, her bones splitting. She probably screamed, forcing sound through her ragged throat and blood flecking the air.
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The pain didn’t stop.

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Somehow, Chiyoh finds him.

She finds him sitting in the snow, bundled in blankets, and watching a man gasp for life. He’s tied to the tree, his companions dead around him. The blood is black against the snow and in the moonlight. A deep gash is imbedded into his chest, and a bloody knife is beside Hannibal.

Amongst the bodies is a child’s remains.

“Hannibal?” Chiyoh whispers as she falls next to him. “Hannibal, what happened?”

He looks at her slowly, his eyes holding no emotion. Blood is on his lips and cheeks. Without a word, her points to the man tied to the tree.

Chiyoh watches the man shiver in the snow. “Where’s Mischa?” She asks quietly.

Hannibal doesn’t bother responding, his hand falling.

“Hannibal,” Chiyoh whispers. “Where’s Mischa?”

Hannibal gives her another dead look. “Ask him,” he whispers, his voice coarse and dead as his eyes.
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She looks at the man tied to the tree and walks over to him, squatting in front of him. “There was a little girl with the boy. Where is she?”

The man laughs, blood flying from his lips. Blood is on his teeth. “She’s gone, Missy! She’s gone, gone, gone.”

Chiyoh slaps the man, leaving him coughing and gasping for air. “What happened to her?”

The man laughs again, his eyes sending shivers down Chiyoh’s spine. “There wasn’t anything left to eat,” he says, cackling. “She didn’t have much meat on her bones, but she—”

Chiyoh kicks the man in the groin. He groans but laughs. She kicks him again. And again. And again. Again and again and again until the man is whining in pain and his smile is gone.

“You disgust me,” she whispers, backing away from the man. “I hope hell isn’t kind to you.”

The man laughs again, and she kicks his head.

“Ask the boy how she tasted,” he whispers before he slips unconscious.

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When Mischa wakes from her trance, the first thing she feels is water against her skin. The water is warm and gentle against her skin, and she relaxes against its touch.

The next thing she feels is pain.

There is the dull ache of her bones, the sharp burn in her throat, and the harsh touch of air on her flesh. Her legs have taken the brunt of the pain, but her stomach is laced with what feels
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like hot wires, and her head is filled with endless throbbing.

Hannibal.

The word will not pass her lips, but it whispers itself in her mind.

Hannibal. Hannibal, where are you?

“You’re awake, aren’t you?” A soft voice says next to her, a woman’s voice.

Mischa realizes that her eyes are not open, and she wills them to open and look around her. The lids flicker and tremble agasint her eyes, and after a few moments, they peel back enough for her to glimpse the light. It filters through the air and reveals the dust floating around her.

“Don’t try to open your eyes if they hurt,” the voice says kindly. “You need your rest.”

Mischa gives up when the light proves to be too much for her, and she opens her mouth instead.

“Don’t speak,” the voice warns, kind but firm, like a mother. “Your throat took a lot of damage, and I want you to drink something before you try to talk. I don’t want you undoing all of the doctor’s work.”

Did Hannibal get her to a doctor, then? She was sick, wasn’t she? Is she at a hospital? Where’s Hannibal?

She opens her mouth again, kind doctor lady be damned. “‘anniba—”

“Shh,” the woman soothes, closing a gentle hand over Mischa’s mouth. “Don’t speak. All of your questions will be answered later, when you have strength.”

Mischa weakly nods and the hand removes itself.

“Hannibal,” she whispers quickly, the name burning her throat but it passes her lips, so she smiles once the word is out.

The woman sighs. “You’re stubborn. That will prove to be good and bad.”

Mischa pries her eyes open and finds the woman with her eyes, trying to convey her question with her quivering gaze. The woman has light brown hair pulled back into a tight bun, and her lips are thin. She’s around 40 years old.

Mischa’s eyes close again, briefly, before dragging them open and staring at the woman again. The woman meets her gaze and seems to understand the pain that must be in Mischa’s eyes.

“Hannibal isn’t here, Mischa,” the woman says quietly as Mishca’s eyes close again.

A soft whine escapes Mischa.

“I don’t know where he is,” the woman continues. “And you can’t worry about that, right now. You need to heal. Please rests.”

Mischa opens her eyes one last time, watching the woman.

“My name is Ieva.”

Ieva was one of the Lecter servants, Mishca learns later. She was Hannibal's nurse before Mischa was born, but her job was transferred to another when she injured her leg. She served as one of the cooks, usually staying out of the way, hence why Mischa didn't recognize her. She was reluctantly fired fairly early in the war, and has been working in an orphanage ever since. Mischa's currently staying at the orphanage.

Ieva found Mischa half dead on the side of the road, her left leg gone after just above the knee, and her right calf and thighs severely butchered. Her stomach had been carved into, but not as severely as her legs. Recognising her, she brought Mischa to the orphanage and managed to find a doctor willing to treat her. Mischa has been at the orphanage for three weeks, and her legs are still healing. She might not be able to stand again.

Ieva went out looking for Hannibal, but she never found him. She even dared venture to the Aunt Hannibal and Mischa were looking for, but she was gone to another country and the servants heard nothing of Hannibal.

"You have to accept that he's gone, Mischa," Ieva told her when she came back from talking to the aunt. "The winter is harsh and the people are harsher."

"Hannibal won't die that easily," Mishca spat back out. "He's out there. Somewhere."

Mischa finds a photograph of Hannibal, from Ieva, and it becomes her most prized possession. She begins to draw Hannibal, practicing with the photo and trying to recreate the memories in her mind. The other children in the orphanage are delighted by her drawings, and soon she's drawing everyone around her. The smallest children are content to simply watch her draw; the older ones demanding a portrait of themselves, like rich dukes and duchesses having their portraits taken. Mischa is happy to indulge them.

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Hannibal leaves the country as soon as his studies allow him to. He travels to Florence, and he stays there. The city is rich with the history of blood and music and art, and he delights in it as he tastes the city on his tongue and touches it with his pencil. He finds La Primavera buried inside the museum, and it captivates him immediately. The touch of color and the curve of the bodies, they were beautiful. He recreates it a thousand times in his journal, sketching the flowers and soft skin with a pencil, but soon, it isn't enough. It isn't enough to
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sit there, in front of the painting, for hours, and recreate a masterpiece with nothing more than his humble pencil and paper.

A man, a policeman, notices him and praises his mockery of a masterpiece. Hannibal notices the pride and intelligence in the policeman.

It's not enough, to recreate that beauty on paper. Hannibal is knowledgeable in the human body, he's studied it at school and at home and he's intimate with the sound of bones breaking under his hands. But none of the blood on his hands has ever been art. It's always been destruction, Thanatos, Nyx, Eris. Never Eros. It's never been *intimate* .

"One day, when the fighting stops, I'll give you everything."

"Ask the boy how she tasted."

It's never been art.

He makes it art, a masterpiece, a beautiful and truly worthy recreation of La Primavera. A man and a woman, gifted to Hades and taken by Thanatos, laid out at Hannibal's feet, acting as true lovers before Eros.

Intimate.

The Eros instinct is one of survival, pleasure, and life. You put the life in your belly and you live. So Hannibal puts their life in his belly and he lives. They are nothing but pigs for the slaughter, made beautiful by Hannibal and his knife.

They will all be beautiful, and gifts to a girl he dares not name anymore.

"I'll give you everything."

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It's years later, and Mischa is still at the same orphanage. She's not quite a woman and not quite a girl anymore, curves formed but her face still young. Youthful. "Where's Ieva?"

The newer helper at the orphanage - Mikael - was in Ieva's room, cleaning the sheets. The room smells of bleach and everything is too clean. It feels dead in the room. "Hm? Oh, hello Mischa."

"Where's Ieva?" Mischa asks softly, entering the room slowly.

"Oh… Ieva. She passed away last night, the sickness finally took her. She died in her sleep." He says the words so… uncaringly.

"Oh."

"I'm sorry, sweetheart. I know you were close with her. Most of us were just wary of her, you know, since she was…" he trails off with a flourish of his hand, as if it was no big deal, as if it was the way things were.

"She wasn't delusional."

A sigh. "She thought that you were a Lecter, sweetheart. We all know that she dreamed up a lot of things and believed them."

"I am a Lecter."

A laugh, but then silence, contemplative. "Sweetheart, don't tell me you… believed Ieva."
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“She wasn’t lying. I told her about my past.”

“But… oh. Oh well. I can’t convince you that you’re not a Lecter. But even if you are, there’s no one left in the Lecter line. It’s just you. They all died.”

“... Not all of them. My brother is still alive.” It’s more like she’s convincing herself of that statement, not Mikael.

“Hannibal? He’s gone, Mischa. They’re all gone. He’s not even your… Mischa, you were born here. Ieva took you on a trip to the doctor when you were sick, and you were attacked by some men and badly injured. You aren’t a Lecter. You’ve lived here all your life.”

“No. Ieva brought me here.” *I am a Lecter.*

“Mischa…”

“No. Stop it. You won’t be able to convince me. I’m sorry.”

A sigh. “I know. I just… I hope that one day you’ll see the truth.”

“I already do.”

I am a Lecter. My name is Mischa Lecter. Hannibal Lecter is my brother. He’s my brother. He loves me. He said he’d protect me.

Chapter End Notes

As always, please leave kudos and comments! All of your lovely comments are the reason that this fic is still going! (however slowly)

The Lecter Child

Chapter Summary

> The reunion between siblings... but is she really what she says she is? Is Procel, Annabelle, the dead child, a Lecter?

Chapter Notes

> Hey would you look at that, an update after... only two months?.
>
> This took me soooo looooong and it still sucks! This will be under heavy editing, but I just really want to post another chapter after two months. I'm so sorry for updating so slowly! I hope it's worth it!
>
> Enjoy the new and very very very heavy chapter ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Good morning, Will," Hannibal murmurs into Will's hair, breathing in his scent.

"Morning," Will mutters, his face tucked against Hannibal's neck and his lips moving against his skin. He stretches in Hannibal's arms, groaning softly, before cuddling right back up against him and breathing deeply. "You smell like sex."

Hannibal chuckles. "I wonder why that is."

"Probably because you had sex with someone last night," Will grumbles. "Someone really sweaty."

"Do you have any guesses as to who it was?" Hannibal muses, moving his lips to Will's temple.

Will hums. “Oh, a couple.”

Hannibal brushes a strand of hair from Will’s eyes, a gleaming look in his eyes. Tender affection and a quiet, simmering lust. “Can the great Will Graham narrow it down to only one?”

“Don’t stroke my ego,” Will mutters, glaring lightly at Hannibal. “But yes, I could.”

“Do enlighten me,” Hannibal says, tucking his head against Will’s neck and kissing him softly at the pulse. The words are a plea whispered against Will’s throat. Dramatic little fucker.

“Can’t do that if you keep yammering,” Will snaps without any real venom. “My brain is fried from all the fucking I did last night.”

“Oh, you too?” Hannibal sounds so damn smug when he says it.

Will sighs, unable to summon any real anger, but he still takes a jab at Hannibal. “Yeah, it was with some old hairy dude who had a weird obsession with my eyes.”

“It’s not weird. It’s perfectly normal.”

“Sure.”

“Hush now, it’s time for breakfast.”

“Yeah, that sounds good. Feed your sweaty husband.” Husband. It’s sounds so natural.

“Of course. He’s lost a lot of energy after last night’s activities.”

“Will it kill you to say the word fuck?”

“Most likely so.”

Will chuckles, mellow from the endorphins even against his best judgement. Hannibal looks so… normal in the mornings. Messy hair, drool on his lips, sleep in his eyes, morning breath…

Will leans forward and kisses Hannibal softly on the lips, slowly, savoring the moment.

“Good morning, my love,” Hannibal whispers against his lips before kissing him quickly again.

“You’ve got a kink for pet names and I don’t know how I feel about it,” Will grumbles against his mouth, leaning away slowly and flopping back down onto the bed.

“I think you don’t mind,” Hannibal muses, walking to the bathroom, naked as the day he was born.

“Yeah, I don’t, but it’s *weird* ,” Will says, stretching on the sheets, the sun warming his also naked body. “You’re a cannibal and you’re vanilla as fuck. And a bottom.”

Hannibal turns and looks at Will, toothbrush in his mouth and an unimpressed expression furrowing his eyebrows. Will gives him a shit eating grin.

“You’re a nightmare,” Hannibal mutters before turning back to brush his teeth. Such a normal… thing to say.

Will shrugs and walks into the bathroom, wrapping his arms around Hannibal's waist, hips slotted against Hannibal's. "At least the nightmares don't plague me anymore."

Or is this just another dream? Can one dream a dream while dreaming?

Hannibal softens and leans back into Will's embrace, comforting. "You've been so carefree and happy," he murmurs. "At peace."

Will nods. "Never thought the day would come."

And maybe it didn't.

Hannibal finishes brushing his teeth and turns around in Will's arms, holding him against his chest. "I'm glad it did, and I'm glad you found it with me."

"Boost your ego a bit?"

"This isn't about my ego," Hannibal murmurs. "This is about you. You're happy. With me. I'm glad you picked me." *And not Jack.*

"Me too," Will murmurs. "Me too."

I am glad for the blood that never stained the kitchen tiles, for the daughter that now breathes.

I am glad I am dreaming this dream.

Breakfast is simple by Hannibal's standards. Abigail slinks out of her room eventually, sleep in her eyes but a small smile on her lips. "Morning, dads."

Will smiles widely, pulling her into a tight hug. “Morning, Abigail.”

Hannibal gives her a sweet smile, asking her about her dreams, and she responds with something vague and obviously a big ‘mind your own business’ to Hannibal. Will smirks. They eat together at the table, Abigail texting, Hannibal reading the paper and Will just sitting there with his coffee in hand, enjoying the warmth of the morning. Most of his mornings are like this, nowadays. Soft cuddles in the morning, soft kisses at breakfast, soft sunlight at noon, soft sunset coffee dates in the evening, and harsher kisses at night, the heat burning his skin.

That’s not to say his life is completely soft.

There are darker nights, harsher nights, with the knife in hand and blood in his mouth as Hannibal teaches him how to carve into bodies. With Hannibal’s voice in his ear and hands on his own, he kills. He picks the victims and is choosy as fuck, but he kills. They never take anything from the body or display anything too elaborate, but they kill.

Will would be lying if he didn’t grow addicted to the feeling of killing beside Hannibal.

Hannibal is the same in death. He’s still soft, affectionate, and smooth as fuck with his knife in hand. He doesn’t turn into the beast Will imagined time and time again. He’s the same. Will has been behind the veil with Hannibal for so long, that he no longer shifts suits to their environment. Not for Will, anyways. He’s just always and forever… Hannibal.

They usually fuck after kills. Blood on their skin, underneath their nails, in their mouths, as they rut against each other like animals and kiss like drowning men gasping for air. Hannibal bottoms, usually, and Will sure as fuck does not complain. Seeing his Hannibal, strong, unbreakable, *dangerous* , underneath Will’s hands and body, completely pliant and willing, *God* it’s addicting.

Abigail is usually out with Annabelle on those nights - thankfully - and Hannibal seems completely unfazed by the woman. Annabelle DuBois, taking their daughter under her wing and not batting an eye at the random sleepovers arranged. Will is still suspicious - there’s

something about her he cannot figure out - but Hannibal is confident in Abigail's safety with her.

"It's not just her safety, it's ours as well," Will commented at one point. "What if Jack sent her, or something? If she's trying to convince Abigail to leave us?"

"Do you think Abigail would leave us?" Hannibal asked.

Will bristled. "I don't know."

Hannibal gave him an unimpressed look.

"Okay, yes, I do know. She wouldn't leave us. But she's gotten close with Annabelle, she could still say something wrong, or get captured, or-"

"Will," Hannibal whispered. "She will be okay."

Will stilled underneath Hannibal's warm hands on his cheeks.

"Trust me."

There's been a hell lot of trust between Hannibal and Will lately. Trust to not turn the knife on each other, to not ring Uncle Jack, to not take Abigail away. Sometimes Will wonders how long it will last.

Annabelle is an interesting character. She introduced an Anthony Dimmonds to Hannibal and Will not long after their first kill together in Florence, and Hannibal recognized him from their brief time in France. A poet. Will has to scoff lightly at the lustful gazes he gives Hannibal (and Will) over the dinner table. Annabelle seems to be very aware of the looks as well, which only baffles Will even more. Was she trying to set Hannibal and Will up with… Anthony? In front of Abigail? It's not like he doesn't enjoy Anthony's company - he's got a

sense of humor and a twinkle in his eyes that seems to entertain Hannibal - but while Anthony's intent is crystal clear, Annabelle's isn't. What does she have to gain from introducing Anthony to them?

Will doesn't like Annabelle.

First, she's not actually Annabelle DuBois. The real Annabelle DuBois is probably in a box in the ocean somewhere, or in the rotting ground. Or maybe even long gone from someone's stomach, if Annabelle's flirty discussions with Hannibal about cooking were anything to go by.

Second, Will can't read her. Okay, he can, but not as well as he'd like to. He can tell when she's scared, nervous, happy, or lying. But she's rarely ever lying, but her entire identity is a lie. She's a mixture of twisted words and lies and half truths - but it's not as if Will isn't familiar with those. She's… so visibly twisted in her morals, but she is so pure in Will's mind. She isn't a killer. Maybe she has killed before, but she's never killed because she enjoyed it. She hasn't killed to feel that rush of adrenaline and to hear the dying gasps of her victim.

Third, she's almost entirely focused on Abigail despite her age. Annabelle is a few years younger than Hannibal, closer in age to Will. She's got hidden greys in her hair and smile written into the skins round her lips and eyes. Yet she dotes on Abigail the way sisters would. If it were motherly, Will would understand. But it isn't motherly. It's… possessive and… sisterly?

Will is terrified of the fact that he doesn't know her intentions towards his daughter.

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"I've become friends with Abigail," Procel murmurs, fiddling with a piece of her hair, her body at ease and nonchalant. "Although, I never call her that. She's called Mischa, now."

"Close enough for your plan to work?" Alana asks, her face impassive but left with the lingering lines of worry and concern for the girl. Her face is a white light in the dimly lit
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room Procel sits in, and Procel looks at her, her eyes drawn in like moths to a flame.

"Yes," Procel says simply. "When it comes down to it, I think I can convince her to choose me over Hannibal and Will. She has a strong sense of self preservation."

Alana nods. "Hence why she left with Hannibal and Will."

"She didn't just leave with them to survive, Alana. I hope you have realized that by now," Annabelle says, pulling her hands from her hair and lacing them together in her lap.

"I know," Alana says softly, the tiredness filling her frame. No, not tiredness. Regret.

"She loves them," Procel whispers, leaning forward, watching the pixels framing Alana flicker under the darkness. "She loves them and they love her." The words are like the whispers of the damned.

"I know," Alana repeats. "But it doesn't change the fact that it's unhealthy. Their entire… family… is unhealthy. It's Stockholm syndrome."

"For Abigail, maybe," Procel muses. "But she was born into a situation that demanded for Stockholm syndrome to occur and I doubt she'll ever love someone who isn't dangerous like Hannibal, Will, her father."

"And for Will?"

Procel has to smile, just a bit, at that. "Will is the captive in his situation, but also the captor. What he has with Hannibal… I doubt our psychiatry has a term for it. A fragile balance made of blood and bone."

Alana doesn't seem as pleased as Procel. "Can the balance be tipped in your favor?"

Procel shrugs. “I can’t convince Will to choose me over Hannibal, but I can make him choose me in favor of protecting Hannibal.”

Alana narrows her eyes.

“I’ll… trick him… into picking me and cooperating with the FBI in favor of sparing Abigail and putting Hannibal in a comfy cell where Will can choose to either abandon him or be with him.” Give him the illusion of escape.

“And what about Hannibal?” Alana says, her face becoming tighter and more unforgiving, but also just a touch scared.

Procel truly grins at that, giving Alana a small reason to worry. “He’ll be the hardest, but I have something up my sleeve.”

“You want to share what that is?” Alana’s voice is so impatient, and scared. Procel watches her with pitying eyes. *You’re so scared of the man you once loved. Scared of what you could never understand. Scared of those who can understand.*

Procel shakes her head slowly and lets the smile leave her lips, but stay in her eyes. “I’m not entirely sure what it is, but I’m working on something.” *Or, someone.*

Alana raises a single, perfectly maintained, eyebrow. “Really?”

Anthony Dimmonds. “It’ll… open a lot of doors for me, as well as force Hannibal’s hand.”

“Don’t do it too soon,” Alana says. “We don’t want to spook him and then lose him.”

“I know, I know. I’ll time it properly. How are things on the FBI side? Or… the Verger side?”

Alana scoffs but stiffens visibly. *You're losing your touch, Alana. Too easily read. Not enough walls, especially since now you need them.* "Jack seems to have his own agenda. Mason does, too."

So Procel is alone, then. Perfect. "And Margot?"

Alana smiles slightly. "She's good. We're good."

Procel tilts her head. "I sense a 'but' coming up."

Alana stiffens again. "It's nothing that will affect the plan."

"Tell me."

She sighs and leans forward, her lips drawn into a thin line. Procel can see her weighing the pros and cons of telling the truth, and she watches her carefully. Eventually, she seems to surrender to telling the truth, and the words that escape her lips are softly spoken. "I'm pregnant."

Procel lifts an eyebrow. Not what she expected. "You cheated on Margot or it's a… friend helping out?"

Alana shakes her head. Procel narrows her eyes. A baby can change a lot of factors in Alana's plan, not Procel's, but certainly Alana's. The baby is vulnerable, is another life that Alana has to protect.

"I… I didn't even find out or try to find out until… until the baby bump showed."

Procel leans further forward and watches Alana carefully. “Baby bumps show up between 12-16 weeks, Alana.”

Alana nods, not looking at Procel. “I know.”

Alana looks too terrified and angry for Procel’s comfort.

“Who’s baby is it?” She asks softly, and at that, Alana dips her head before lifting it and meeting Procel’s gaze.

No.

Procel doesn’t need a verbal answer. The pain and *fear* in Alana’s eyes is enough.

“Hannibal’s.”

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“You’re… pregnant,” Margot states, her voice disbelieving alongside her face.

Alana nods.

Margot chuckles. “I’m assuming you’re quite far along because that’s not fat on your belly. I would know. I’ve gotten quite a close look at that belly.”

Alana doesn’t say anything.
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“Hey,” Margot whispers, sitting down next to Alana on the bed, the mattress dipping under her weight, moving Alana slightly closer to her. “Don’t be so scared. You aren’t me. Mason won’t hurt you. He wants nothing to do with your baby.”

Alana shakes his head. “It’s not that.”

Margot puts an arm around Alana, rubbing comforting circles into her arm. “Then what is it? I promise I won’t judge. Or laugh at you. I might chuckle, but you know how it is.”

Alana is still silent.

“It can’t be worse than whatever I’ve gone through,” Margot whispers. “If it is, I’ll be here for you, ready to kick anyone’s ass. Who’s the dad, anyways? You slept with them before you met me, right?”

Alana shivers and takes a deep breath, the air drawing trembles from her body. “Hannibal,” she whispers, the name shuddering past her lips.

Margot stares at Alana. “Hannibal,” she says slowly, the name dangerous in her mouth. “I know that you were with him before he was … you know, but… he’s the father?”

Alana can only nod.

“But… I would’ve taken him as a guy who uses condoms religiously and wouldn’t sleep with you when you were ovulating,” Margot says bluntly, her eyes digging into Alana.

Alana laughs bitterly under her breath. “We both knew we were clean, and Hannibal never slept with me during ovulation, except for once, and then I used the morning after pill…”

Margot watches as Alana shakes in Margot’s arms. “You can get an abortion, you know? If you don’t want to keep it.”

Funny how the thing in her stomach becomes a thing as soon as they discuss killing it. *It.* Would Hannibal call the life in her womb an 'it' if he discussed killing it? Or would he grin as he asked Alana if she wanted to kill her child? She shakes a bit more and puts her head on Margot's shoulder. "I could. But…"

Margot waits patiently for her to continue.

"Hannibal has a thing… about family," Alana says softly. She's thought about this for a while now, ever since she lost Abigail to that man. And the thinking has only increased the moment she found life in her belly. A life given to her from Hannibal… it's almost ironic. Almost. "He would do anything to protect his family. Will and Abigail, he'd do anything for them. This baby, is his flesh and blood." She laughs again, quietly and bitterly. "I think he wanted me to get pregnant. I don't know how he did it, but he did something and now I'm carrying his child. He won't hurt his own baby. He'll hurt me, kill me, he promised that, but this baby… he won't hurt his baby."

"So as long as you have the baby in you…" Margot begins.

"He won't hurt me." The words are said with such conviction it hurts Margot's heart.

She looks at Alana. "How can you be sure? Even if he does care for the baby, what's stopping him from kidnapping you first chance he gets and making sure the baby is safe on his own terms?"

"I don't know," Alana whispers. "But this is the best bet I got. He won't hurt his baby. Out of pride or twisted love, he won't."

Margot sighs and wraps her arms heavily around Alana, pressing her face into Alana's hair. "If you say so."

"I have to," Alana says. "This baby could save my life."

Margot nods. “Then you keep the baby. And I’ll be here for you. Once the baby is born, do you want to keep them or give them away?”

Alana shakes her head. “I don’t know. I haven’t thought that far. Things get complicated once the baby is born and separate from me.”

“So for now, we keep the baby,” Margot reassures, pulling Alana tighter against her, her breath warm against Alana’s skin. “And we get rid of Hannibal before the baby is born.”

Alana nods, leaning fully on Margot.

“Do you think he knows?” Margot muses quietly, petting Alana’s hair. “About the baby.”

“Maybe,” Alana whispers, her hands folding over her abdomen. “I’m not sure whether or not he was trying to get me pregnant. I need to stop trying to think like Hannibal. I can’t. I can never know what goes on inside his head.” Only Will can.

Margot hums in agreement.

“I can only do what I can, to survive.”

Alana may have had doubts about Mason’s plan, thinking that Procel was the better bet, but now she knows. Now her hand is forced. Mason will kill Hannibal and lift the sword from Alana’s head. Procel would simply put him behind bars. Hannibal wouldn’t stay there for long, and it would only be a matter of time before he came for her. Her and the baby who wouldn’t be so much of a baby by the time Hannibal escaped from prison. And for Will and Abigail… Alana can only hope that Procel convinces them to run before it’s too late.

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“Annabelle, he’s even more beautiful than I remember,” Anthony sighs, slouching in his chair and scribbling away in his journal.

Annabelle snorts, giving Anthony a playful look. “I’ve never met a man with looser pants than yours.”

Anthony has the decency to at least pretend to be offended. “Please, you can’t say a thing. You’ve slept with me more times than I can count, and quite quickly as well! Your trousers are just as loose as mine.”

“At least I don’t lust after married men.”

“Pft. I’m not trying to steal Rafael away from his dear Elio. Or Elio away from Rafael! I just want the opportunity to enjoy the both of them. Not to mention, did you notice the way they interact?”

“You’re going to have to be more specific, Anthony.”

“Rafael is a *bottom* , Annabelle! Please tell me you noticed.”

“For the love of…” she sighs, but a smile is on her lips. Anthony is filled with such a young spirit, such life. She can’t help but enjoy his presence. “Rafael is not a bottom.”

Anthony gives Annabelle a disbelieving look. “Maybe not always, but he’s most certainly a bottom for Elio. And a power bottom at that.”

“Why are you like this?”

“Because I can be,” he says defiantly before sipping his coffee. “And I know you agree, I can see it in your eyes.”

“Really now?” She narrows his eyes at him, tilting her head back and giving a disbelieving look.

“Yes. You know that Rafael is a power bottom and you know that Elio loves topping that man.”

She groans. “Yes, I do, but I don’t want to talk about it. I have no need to speculate about their sex lives.”

He laughs, tilting his head back as he does so. “You’re helping me get into their sex lives, though!”

She pauses before quietly saying, “Ignoring that fact.”

Anthony laughs and leans back, tapping his chin as he muses. “Do you think Rafael would top me—”

“Okay that’s enough,” Annabelle says, slapping her hand over Anthony’s mouth. “You are hopeless.”

He grins at her and nips at her fingers. She doesn’t move.

“Kinky,” he says into her hand, the word horribly muffled.

“You’re the one biting me, Anthony,” she reminds him, and he laughs, his eyes crinkling beautifully.

You’ll be a beautiful corpse for Hannibal.

“What do you think about their kinks?” Annabelle asks, a dark playfulness lurking behind her eyes.

Anthony coughs and she removes her hand. “What happened to ‘no need to speculate about their sex lives?’”

“Answer me,” she says, rolling her eyes.

He sticks out his tongue and shifts in his seat. “Rafael is most definitely a kinky little shit.”

“Of course,” she says, remembering blood. “But how so?”

“Power,” Rafael says immediately. “He’s a bottom, but the transference of power is extremely important to him. He probably only submits for Elio.”

Annabelle smirks. “Enough with the bottoming and topping, Anthony.”

“You asked!”

“About kinks! Not bottoming!”

“Power is heavily related to most kinks,” he mutters, glaring at her.

“Yes, that is true,” she admits. “But tell me something else. More specific.”

Tell me about blood.

“More specific…” he trails off, looking off in the distance and sipping at his coffee. “He’s gentle, I would think, at least with Elio. You’d have to be, with that much adoration in your eyes when looking at your loved one. But he’d enjoy something more demanding and painful.”

“Biting?” Annabelle says, just for the hell of it.

Anthony nods, still looking away. “Definitely.”

Annabelle tries not to think about Anthony dying during sex because Hannibal decided to go cannibalistic. It’s a more horrifying image that she originally thought it’d be.

“And… now that I think about it,” Anthony muses. “He’d probably have a thing for blood, as well. Especially with the whole oral fixation thing.”

“Makes sense,” she says, ignoring the visions of red. The bodies lurking in the darkness of Florence.

“Why do I get the impression you’re saying that for a different reason than the one I suggested?” He asks, looking at her suspiciously. “I’m saying it makes sense because he’s so obsessive with food and the way Elio eats. You… you’re not saying it makes sense because of that. There’s something else.”

It’s surprising how well Anthony can read people. How easily he can peer into other people’s minds.

“Because there is something else,” she says, looking at Anthony with a much more serious tone. “Ignoring kinks. Just… let’s drop that subject. Please.”

He sets down his notebook and coffee. “Okay,” he says softly, watching her carefully.

She takes a deep breath. “I did some digging about Rafael, per your request,” she begins slowly, choosing her words carefully.

“Go on.”

She pretends to be hesitant, to be reluctant to speak. “Rafael Angelo… well, frankly speaking, he looked quite different two years ago.” She reaches into her bag and pulls out the folders that have been burning a hole in her bag for weeks. She hands them to Anthony.

“Where the hell did you get official FBI level documents?” Anthony says, quickly snatching up the folder. He opens it, and she knows that the first thing he sees is the picture.

“I have friends,” she says softly, the words not reaching Anthony.

“What is this?” He says, but his voice is less surprised than she would have expected. He sounds… genuinely intrigued.

“The real Rafael Angelo.”

His eyes smirk and the corners of his mouth twitch. “So, the Rafael we know, is a little *liar* .”

Annabelle stays silent, encouraging Anthony to speak more.

“And I’m assuming Elio is…” He turns a page. “Yup, also a fake.” Another page is turned. “So is the daughter.” He chuckles, licks his lips and flits his eyes up towards Annabelle. “Please tell me you have pictures of our Rafael and Elio, but with their real names.”

She hands him another folder.

He opens it and reads, ignoring the photo. She sees his lips mouth the name *Hannibal Lecter* and *William Graham.* The words: *Wanted. Cannibal. FBI.*

"Well fuck," Anthony whispers before groaning. "Please tell me he didn't feed us people."

"I doubt it," Annabelle says. "It's his trademark and he doesn't want to risk getting caught here."

Anthony reads more of the files, and she sees *Alana Bloom, Jack Crawford, Abigail Hobbs.*

"Mischa," he says. "She's… a victim?"

"Some would argue that she no longer is."

Anthony closes the folder and looks at her. "How?"

"She's safe," she says. "Safer than she'll ever be. And loved."

Anthony's face scrunches up in confusion. "How is she *safe* ? Hannibal… is a fucking cannibal and serial killer."

"Hannibal wouldn't dare lay a hand on her," Annabelle snaps, her tone turning too sharp. "And he is willing to kill for her. I'd say that she's damn safe."

He lifts a perfectly cut eyebrow. "How do you know what Hannibal would do?"

"Read the rest of the file," she says softly.

He does, and she watches him mouth *Doctor Annabelle Procel DuBois. Psychiatrist. FBI.*

“You’re here to… what? Catch him?” He says, his eyebrows moving with a flourish.

She twists her hands together, mocking worry. Concern. Regret in the sharing of secrets. “Something like that.”

He laughs quietly, but then it grows louder and louder. “Doctor Annabelle Procel DuBois, working with the FBI to catch Hannibal the Cannibal.” His laughs rings through the apartment, and he covers his face with a hand. “I can’t believe it. It’s like a fucking mystery novel. The agent goes undercover as a performer, and befriends the enemy. A spy.”

“And she needs help,” Annabelle murmurs.

The line is cast.

Anthony looks at her. “ *My* help?”

The fish sees it.

She nods and clears her throat. “Yes.”

“How could *I* help?” He says. “I’m just a poet. A poet who wants to sleep with a fucking cannibal and his husband.”

The fish swims towards it, intrigued for a meal.

“They don’t suspect you,” she whispers, luring him deeper. “They suspect me.”

The fish nears it.

He huffs. “And so you want me to… what? Be the lure?”

“Essentially, yes,” Procel says. “Spook Hannibal. Let him know that we know he’s here.” Force his hand.

“How?”

“Drop his name in conversation,” she says. “When Abigail and I are out, and you’re spending a private dinner with them, flirt with them. Hint about knowing the real Rafael Angelo. Say something poetic about the masks men wear.”

“Won’t he just kill me as soon as I become a threat?” Anthony says, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his knees. “He has a good way to get rid of evidence.”

“But too many witnesses,” she says. “Abigail and I will be close by, and they can’t kill here in Florence. There’s too much risk.”

“This man is a professional, *doctor.”*

“He’s also in love,” she snaps. “He came to Florence with Abigail and Will to protect them. He won’t risk it. There are too many unknown factors.”

“Especially since he suspects you,” he points out.

Procel nods. “He won’t be able to do anything but run. And when he tries to, I’ll be there to catch him.”

“Fine,” Anthony says, laughing to himself. “I can’t believe myself, but I’m impulsive as hell. So, yes. I’ll do it, *doctor.* ” He laughs again, covering his mouth. “I’ll help you catch the killer. Be one hell of a book, now that I think about it.”

The fish bites, unaware of the hook.

“Thank you,” Procel whispers. “Don’t do anything about it without telling me.”

“Of course, doctor.”

“And don’t call me that,” she says. *It’s as if you’re calling me Hannibal.*

~~~

Anthony stays silent for weeks, as per Procel’s request. They have dinner with the Angelos - or rather, the Lecters - a few times, and while she can see the newfound suspicion in both Will’s and Anthony’s eyes, no one does anything. She continues to sleep with Anthony, and also socializes with Abigail, creating closer bonds. They’ll spend the night together fairly often - coinciding with what Procel assumes to be Will and Hannibal’s newer kills - and she can feel the tension hiding behind curtains, unnoticed, but there.

The tension snaps when she least expects it.

It’s a night with Abigail again. They’re spending the evening by playing cards, Abigail insisting on playing slapjack, her grin wide as her younger, faster hands beating Annabelle’s. They’re laughing loudly, squealing in delight when one of them achieves victory, and the atmosphere is comfortable. Abigail reminds Annabelle of her childhood - young, happy, and completely under Hannibal’s protection. She seems so carefree, even with the murders occurring behind her back. Protected.
~~~

Procel hears something thud in the back room, and suddenly everything in her freezes. She doesn't have a pet. There's no wind.

"Who's there?" She calls, motioning to Abigail to be quiet. Abigail obeys, a fear in her eyes. It's been so long since she knew death, so long since she knew fear.

There is no response, and only silence. Procel can feel that human presence. There's someone here.

She reaches into her bag and pulls out a hunting knife. Abigail's eyes widen.

How long has it been since the last time you killed?

"Hide in the bedroom," Procel mouths, pressing the handle of the knife into Abigail's palm. "You know how to hunt, this is no different. Use it if they try to hurt you."

Procel could be acting completely paranoid right now. Something could have fallen without a human being there. And even if someone was there, it could just be a stupid burglar. It doesn't have to a murderer in her temporary home.

But Procel isn't taking any risks. Not when she's so close to Hannibal.

Abigail obeys her and walks quietly to the bedroom, the door locking quietly behind her. Procel breathes deeply and pulls out her own knife, the blade longer and the handle covered in soft leather.

Blood. Screaming.

She breathes deeply again. She opens and closes the front door loudly, her footsteps clear. She whispers something to herself. Her footsteps become quiet again as she steps forward towards the back room.

"Who's there?" She calls again, hiding her knife against her thigh.

Still no reply.

She turns on the light, and there is no one there. There's nothing on the floor. Nothing knocked over. The yellow tiles are clean, the books are on their shelves, and the doors are all closed. Was she being purely paranoid?

Something hits the back of her head, and she falls to the floor, the knife against her thighs clattering against the tile.

Apparently you weren't.

~~~

She wakes up tied to a chair. Her hands are bound and there's something wet on her cheeks. Blood? There's no gag, though. Why is there no gag? Is she still in the apartment?

She manages to open her eyes, and she sees two men sitting before her, knives in their hands. They're dressed in black, but they don't have masks. They're speaking quietly to each other, and she can't see any signs of Abigail. Hopefully she's safe. Hannibal and Will would kill Annabelle if something happened to Abigail.

"You thieves?" She manages to say, her voice a croak.

They turn their heads towards her, and they both grin.
~~~

“You’re awake!” The one on the left says, and she recognises his voice. Where does she know him from?

They step forward and tug her head back by her hair, gloved hands cruel against her scalp. “How are you feeling, Mischa?”

Oh. That’s where I know you from.

“Dean,” she says softly, finally recognizing the man holding her head. “I thought you died.”

He chuckles. “No, I’m still very much alive, no thanks to you.”

“How did you survive the fire?” She asks, her hands subtly moving against the tape binding them. She wonders if she could snap them.

“Painfully so,” Dean says, letting go of her hair and stepping back. “I lost a leg in the process.”

“So we’re like twins, now?” She says softly, and the other man slaps her. She groans quietly but manages to smile. “Hello, Cisco.”

“Hello, *Mischa,”* Cisco spits. “Or would you prefer ‘Annabelle DuBois?’”

“Either one works for me,” she says, shrugging against the binds. She’s disarmed and tied to a chair. She doesn’t know why Dean and Cisco are here. She doesn’t know if Abigail is safe. Hannibal and Will won’t check on Abigail until morning. She’s honestly a bit fucked.

“Well, *Señora DuBois* ,” Cisco drawls. “We’re here for some revenge.”

“You gonna burn me?” She muses quietly, her brain frantically turning in search of a plan. “Burn me like how I burned you?”

They both laugh loudly, and just hidden by their laughs, she hears a door click open.

Abigail.

“Or will you cut me?” She says loudly, hoping to draw their attention to her. “Cut me and then burn me?” Her voice comes out too desperate, but they’ll write it off as fear. Not hope.

They near her again, and her hair is grabbed by Cisco.

“Don’t tell us how you’d like to be killed,” he whispers harshly. The door doesn’t make another sound.

“Then do enlighten me,” she whispers back, and then she spits in his face.

He roars in rage and slaps her, her neck protesting at how quickly her head moves. “Bitch.”

“I prefer Annabelle DuBois or Mischa,” she reminds him, pushing more buttons. “Not your name.”

He moves to hit her again, but Dean holds him back. “Not yet.”

“No, not yet,” she says, sneering at the two of them. “Dean dearest would like to satisfy a few sexual fantasies before killing me.”

It’s Dean’s turn to hit her, and she tastes copper. She spits it out, glimpsing at Dean with a cruel grin.

All eyes on me.

“You’d like that, wouldn't you?” He whispers, moving closer to her and leaning down to her, his breath hot against her cheek. “Like the fucking whore you are.”

“I’m the whore?” She whispers, narrowing her eyes at him and casting a glance at Cisco. She sees a faint shadow behind him. “Who was the one to sleep behind their wife’s back?”

Another slap, harder this time. She tastes more blood in her mouth, and it trickles past her lips.

“You were lucky to catch my eye,” he snarls.

“You were lucky to get a taste of this,” she spits back.

“No, I wasn’t,” he whispers, gripping her chin tightly. “No one is lucky to get a taste of the mud.”

“Oh, you tasted far more than mud,” she replies, grinning with teeth she knows are stained red.

“Dean,” Cisco says, stepping next to him. Thankfully Dean doesn’t look back at him, only glances. “Remember what we’re here for.”

“Yes, do remember,” Mischa says.

Eyes on me. Eyes on me.

Cisco grabs her hair and leans close enough for her to feel his beard against her cheek. “You shut it, whore.”

“Make me,” she throws back.

It has its desired effect, those words. Cisco shoves her gloved fingers past her lips and she gags, but they’re both staring so intently at her. *Eyes on me.* They won’t look behind them.

Just a bit longer. C’mon, Abigail. Hunt.

Before she can bite down, Cisco removes his hand and Dean is watching her with cruelty lustful eyes. She feels her first pang of real fear.

“Should we take turns?” Dean asks Cisco softly. “Or just take her at the same time?”

Please, Abigail.

Before Cisco can reply, a knife flashes in the faint moonlight and cuts into his throat.

Abigail.

Dean whips around, but he’s too late, too unsuspecting, too distracted by his lust.

Blood on the tiles, blood on the sheets, blood on her hands.

His throat bleeds as well.

“Mischa,” she calls loudly. “Cut me loose.”

Abigail is standing there, knife in her hands and blood all over her torso and hands. She’s trembling as she stands there, her lips wobbling. She looks so scared.

“Mischa,” she calls again, but there is no response.

Cursing inwardly, she tries again. “Abigail.”

That gets a jerk of her head, and bright baby blue eyes looking at her in desperation.

“Cut me loose.”

Abigail nods once, twice, and then a third time. She wobbles over towards Mischa, stepping over the leaking bodies, and shudders out unsteady breaths. She reaches Mischa and fumbles with the blade as she nears the binds.

“You’re okay, Abigail,” Mischa whispers. “They’re gone. They can’t hurt you. He can’t hurt you.”

Nicholas Boyle is dead.

Her hands are steady as they cut through Mischa’s bonds, and as soon as she can, she leaves the seat and takes the knife from Abigail’s hands. The knife is placed gingerly on top of Dean’s body.

“You’re safe, Abigail,” Mischa whispers, opening her arms in invitation. “You’re okay.”

Abigail accepts, bursting into tears as she collapses into Mischa's arms. Her body shudders with the tears, her wails muffled by Mischa's shirt. She cries and she cries against Mischa, and Mischa simply holds her. She holds her tightly, rubbing soothing circles into Abigail's body, and whispering comforting words.

You are safe. I am here for you. I will protect you.

But Abigail was the one who protected Mischa, surprisingly. Abigail was the first one to kill.

"I'm sorry I'm so sorry," Abigail whispers into a small whine. "I'm so sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry for," Mischa reassures her. "You saved me. I'm safe. We're both safe. They won't be harming anyone anytime soon."

She lets Abigail cry against her for a few more minutes, but when her cries finally die down and her wails become heavy breaths, she slowly pries herself out of Abigail's clutch.

"Abigail," Mischa whispers. "You're covered in blood. Go run a bath for yourself, and I'll dispose of the bodies."

Abigail nods her head jerkily and wobbles towards the bathroom. Mischa stays still and watches her until she's out of sight.

"Fuck," she whispers, dropping to her knees. She crouches low and wraps her arms around herself, staring at the blood on the floor and the bodies of Dean and Cisco. "Fuck."

She rocks back and forth, releasing shuddering breaths. She hasn't killed in so long. She hasn't seen death in so long. She slaps a hand over her mouth as she collapses on the floor and sobs quietly. She forgot what the death was like.

And yet, you're running towards Death himself.

"Get a hold of yourself," she mutters to the thick air around her.

The bodies on the floor do not reply. They simply stare at her.

She stands shakily and clenches her jaw. The bodies. She needs to dispose of the bodies.

She walks to the kitchen and puts on the surgical gloves she wears when cleaning - wounds or the apartment - and pulls out her meat cleaver, whispering comforting words to herself. She briefly checks if it needs sharpening - it doesn't - and walks back to the bodies, the cleaver and several plastic bags in hand. The thicker clothing is removed - leather jackets, boots, belts, etc. - and she puts those all together in a bag. She cuts the bodies into smaller pieces and puts each one into a bag. The bags are tired securely. When she's done with the bags, she brings bleach and towels to clean. She scrubs until her hands are raw and the tiles have no smell nor taint of blood on them. The bags of flesh are placed in a trash can out back, which she'll move to another part of town tomorrow morning. Some of the bags will be given to where straw dogs like to eat. Some bags she'll throw into an innocent person's yard. The clothes she places into the washing machine, and the belts are left in a separate bag.

She looks at her own clothes and softly curses again. She needs to wash herself.

Abigail is sitting in the bath when Mischa opens the door, holding herself with pale, freckled arms and staring at the wall. She makes no movement to show that she's noticed Mischa's entrance. There's still blood in her hair and on her skin.

"Abigail."

Abigail turns her head quickly towards Mischa, hiding her body with her arms and hands. "How do you know my name?"

Ah, so she's out of shock, then.

Mischa enters and kneels besides the bathtub, moving slowly and acting as non-threatening as possible - which can be a bit of a challenge when you're coated in blood and smelling like bleach. "I've known who you are, for a while."

Abigail does not move, but watches Mischa with wary eyes. "How?"

"I recognized you from the papers," Mischa says quietly. "I keep up with the American news. I read

Tattlecrime."

Abigail scoffs. "Of course you do." She looks down at the pink water and bites her lip. "So you know who my dads are, then."

Mischa nods. "Yes."

"Are you gonna call the police?" Abigail asks softly, her hair falling into her eyes and hiding her face. "Put them in prison?"

"No," Mischa says quietly, and Abigail looks up to her at that. Mischa offers a small, half-hearted smile. "I think you already know that I'm not in a position to point fingers."

"You're a killer," Abigail whispers. "Like my dads."

Mischa shakes her head. "I'm not like them. Death, to me, isn't… it isn't something I enjoy."

"But you kill," Abigail says. "You've killed people and people want to kill you."

“Some people,” Mischa says. “I kill people who deserve to die and the people who want to kill me have every reason to want to.”

“Who were they?” Abigail asks, her eyes flicking past Mischa’ shoulder and towards the doorway of the bathroom. “The men.”

“Dean and Cisco,” Mischa answers. “I used to work with them, selling drugs. We were based in Florida, back then.”

“And why did they want you dead?”

Mischa huffs. “I found out that the drugs we had been selling were used as profit to… support a trafficking ring. So I called the cops anonymously, and set the warehouse where we stored our drugs and did business to the ground, all twenty dealers inside of it.”

“And you…” Abigail trails off, clears her throat, and starts again. “And you slept with Dean?”

Mischa nods. “He was married, I was young, and we were selling drugs. Sex was easy.”

Abigail doesn’t respond to that, but asks a new question. “Annabelle isn’t your name, is it?”

Mischa shakes her head. “It’s not the name my parents gave me.”

“Is Mischa your real name?” Abigail asks, and the name looks so strange on her lips.

Mischa wants to say no. She wants to keep Abigail in the dark for a little while longer, but she can’t bear to. “Yes,” she whispers, smiling sadly. “It is.”

“Like me,” Abigail says. “We have the same name.”

Mischa chuckles softly. “Yeah. We do, don’t we? Mischa.”

Abigail nods and turns back to the water, lifting her hand to run it through the pink liquid.

“Let me bathe you,” Mischa whispers. “I can help you get rid of the blood.”

Abigail laughs bitterly, but shifts in her seat to be more open to Mischa. “I thought I was rid of the blood.”

Mischa grabs a towel and starts lathering Abigail’s shoulders and back with soap. “I don’t think you ever will be, Abigail,” she murmurs, her hands gentle against freckled skin. “You’re drawn to it. Or it to you.”

“Because of my dad?” Abigail asks, her voice bordering on angry.

“Which one?” Mischa asks. “You have three fathers.” She rubs the towel firmly against Abigail’s neck, hard enough to remove the blood but gentle enough to not cause discomfort to Abigail. “Garrett Jacob Hobbs.” She uses a small cup to pour water over the soapy skin. “Will Graham.” She moves to another patch of bloody skin. “Hannibal Lecter.”

Abigail shudders.

“Which one is it that tied death to you?”

Abigail shakes her head. “My birth father maybe.” She pauses. “But they all did that. Will was drawn to me, and he brought Hannibal with him. So Death followed.”

“Are you tired of the blood?” Mischa asks quietly, her voice barely audible. “Are you tired of the death?”

“I am,” Abigail admits. “But I can’t escape it. I thought I escaped it here, in Florence, but I didn’t. You found me. And you brought death.”

“Don’t you know your fathers are still killing?” Mischa asks. “Here, in Florence?”

“But I don’t see any of it,” Abigail snaps. “I don’t see the blood, I don’t taste it, either. They might kill once or twice a month, but I never see the death. I was free.”

“Do you resent me for bringing it back into your life?” Mischa asks.

Abigail shakes her head again. “It’s not your fault.” She sighs. “You didn’t ask for the blood and the death.”

No. She didn’t. But she’s running towards it, reaching out with childish hands, hoping to grasp Death.

Mischa switches to washing Abigail’s hair, gently scrubbing the soap into Abigail’s scalp. Her hair is slightly blonde in certain places, the sun kissing it. “No, I didn’t.”

~~~

Abigail agrees to keep the entire situation a secret, and to say that Annabelle ran into her rapist from ten years ago, if Hannibal and Will were to ask.

The tension snapping only leads to more destruction.
~~~

Abigail and Annabelle have a girls night out again, and this time, Hannibal and Will spend an evening with Anthony. Annabelle told Anthony that this is the night to drop the bomb, the night to whisper the name *Hannibal Lecter* into Rafael Angelo's ear, and Anthony looked so eager. He spent an hour picking his outfit, and debating on whether or not to bring a weapon. Annabelle strongly advised him against it.

"They won't harm you," Annabelle had reassured him. "They can't."

It had been one of the heavier lies she told him that evening.

When she conveniently remembers that she left her scarf at the Angelo's apartment, an hour later, she brings Abigail with her back to the Angelo apartment, and she's armed. A gun in her purse, as well as a hunting knife.

They don't both on knocking - Abigail opens the door - and when they enter the apartment, they see the limp body of Anthony Dimmonds on the kitchen floor, Will and Hannibal engaged in tense conversation as they stand over the corpse.

Abigail gasps loudly, covering her hands and taking a step away from the body twenty feet ahead.

Hannibal and Will's heads snap up at the same time, their sharp eyes capturing Annabelle and Abigail.

"Abigail," Will says, too quickly and too foolishly. Hannibal's eyes narrow and his hands move slightly towards Will, too late.

Will walks quickly to Abigail and Annabelle, embracing Abigail quickly and dragging her away from Annabelle.

"Hannibal," Will calls sharply, and Annabelle's hands itch to grab a weapon.

Hannibal strides over, calmly, dangerously, and stops besides Will. “Ms DuBois.”

“Doctor,” Annabelle whispers.

The darkness drops over Hannibal and Will’s eyes.

“Do you need help disposing the body?” She asks softly.

Hannibal and Will remain unimpressed, and she can see the twitch of Will’s hands on Abigail.

Hannibal moves to step forward, but Abigail speaks before he can.

“Don’t hurt her,” Abigail whispers quickly, her pleading doe eyes looking up at Hannibal.

He is kind when he speaks, but not gentle. “Why? According to the man in our kitchen, she was the one who tipped him off about us. She knows who we are, and she is most certainly not who she says she is.”

“Her name is Mischa,” Abigail says before Annabelle can speak for herself. “She knew who we are ever since she met us. She doesn’t want to turn us in or hurt us.”

“Really?” Hannibal says, looking to Annabelle, who nearly shakes at the full intensity of his gaze. “Is that so?”

“If I wanted you behind bars, I would have called the FBI or Mason Verger the moment I laid eyes on you,” Annabelle says.

“Mason Verger?” Will asks, his eyes cold and dangerous as he watches Annabelle.

“He has a bounty on your head,” she whispers before bitterly laughing quietly. “Plenty of money for your capture.”

Will stiffens and his arms around Abigail tighten.

“Do you need help disposing the body?” Annabelle asks again. “I am not here to hurt you. I’m not here to threaten you. I’m here because I want to protect Abigail.”

“Why?” Will asks, finally releasing Abigail so he can stand in front of Annabelle and watch her with eyes that see too much.

“What do you see, Will?” She asks. “What do you see in my eyes?”

Will shakes his head. “I don’t. I don’t know why you want to help Abigail, or why you want to help us. Be near us. You’re not a killer. You’re familiar with death but you aren’t a killer. You can’t a killer fanatic. You never knew Abigail before Florence. And for some reason, you look at Hannibal like he’s the sun.”

Annabelle softens at his words. “Abigail saved my life a few weeks ago. I had old enemies break into my apartment and try to kill me. Abigail killed them before they had a chance.”

Hannibal doesn’t look surprised, but Will does, if only for a moment. He’s soon nodding and huffing out a quiet laugh.

“Of course,” Will whispers. “Of course she did.”

“Are you mad?” Abigail asks him. “That I killed them?”

Will looks to her with adoration and love and devotion in his eyes. “No, god no. I just… I wanted you to be free of the blood.”

She nods. “I know.”

“Let me help with the body,” Annabelle says. “And then we can talk.”

~~~

“Do you trust Annabelle?” Hannibal asks one evening, far after Abigail has fallen asleep.

Will is laying beside him, their arms and legs carelessly entwined. They’re naked, covered in sweat and come but not blood, and the open window casts pale light across their bodies. The last few minutes have been spent coming down from the high of orgasm, and simply touching each other with no rush and no burning desire. A comfortable, quiet but present need to touch each other’s skin.

“Yes,” Will says, not looking at Hannibal, but instead looking at the hands tracing his hipbone. “I trust her with Abigail.”

Hannibal hums, but Will can tell it’s not in agreement.

“Why don’t you?” Will asks. “You trusted her before, but now, after she helped us hide Anthony’s body, you don’t?”

Hannibal takes one of Will’s hand in his own, turning it in the moonlight.

“What do you see?” Hannibal asks, focused entirely on Will’s hand. “In my opinion?”
~~~

Will sighs and rolls onto his side so he faces Hannibal, his hand holding Hannibal's. Their gazes meet, and Will will never be tired of the adoration he sees in Hannibal's eyes.

"You think she's manipulating us," Will whispers, pressing a soft kiss against Hannibal's wrist. "And now you know how far she'd be willing to go in order to gain our trust."

"She knows too much," Hannibal says softly. "And while Abigail dotes on her… she is a threat to this life we've made. She could be a spy."

"For Jack?" Will asks.

Hannibal nods. "I believe it is most certainly possible."

Will sighs and rests his head on Hannibal's chest. "Why can't we just… be free of this. I just want to be happy with my husband and daughter."

Hannibal's chest swells in pride and affection. "You know I feel the same, Will. And I will do everything in my power to maintain this life we've made together."

Even if it isn't his reality to control.

"What are you going to do?" Will asks, lifting his head to look at Hannibal from behind a curtain of dark curls.

"I have a friend who owes me a favor," Hannibal says. "They'll take care of it for us."

"We're not doing it ourselves?" Will asks.

The tips of Hannibal's lips twitch upwards. "I want to see what happens, but from a distance."

~~~

"They trust me," Procel announces on her call with Alana. "Abigail especially."

Alana gives a smile, but it doesn't reach her eyes.

"How's the baby?" Procel asks. "You said you're keeping it, so how's it doing? Hanging in there?"

Alana nods. "The baby is fine."

"So what's with the sad face?" Procel asks, tilting her head. "You seem… anxious."

Alana bites at her lower lip and looks down at her hand in her lap. "Jack is flying to Florence tomorrow morning."

Procel stiffens. "Why? I'm nearly there!"

Alana shakes her head. "He found a link to Hannibal and an old killer in Florence. Il Mostro. He believes that Il Mostro is Hannibal's beginnings."

Procel stares helplessly at the screen. Jack isn't wrong, Il Mostro was Hannibal, but he's wrong about the beginnings. Hannibal's beginnings go further than a murder spree in Florence. "If Hannibal sees him, this entire plan is ruined. Tell Jack to stay back."

"Jack just buried his wife," Alana says, her voice tired. "He won't listen to anyone."
~~~

“He can’t come here, not when he’s emotionally unstable and not when I’m so close to catching Hannibal,” Procel hisses.

Alana sighs. “I can’t stop him. And I won’t. Because Mason has been contacted and he’s sending a group of men to capture Hannibal.”

Procel’s eyes widen and she shakes her head slightly, the movement jerky. “When?” She spits out. “When?!”

“I don’t know,” Alana says softly, guilt creeping into her eyes. “They won’t tell me. But they’re going to take Will, too. Maybe even Abigail.”

Procel curses loudly and bangs get hand against the table, shaking her computer. “Dammit, Alana!”

“I know,” Alana whispers. “So you need to get Abigail out of there. There’s no hope for Hannibal and Will, and frankly, what’s coming for them, they deserve. Abigail is innocent, and you need to save her.”

“I can’t take her away from them!” Procel reminds Alana. “She’s their child! And I am merely a stranger who they still have reason to mistrust! If I tell them about Mason and Jack, they’ll no longer trust me and they’ll be gone. They’ll disappear again and we won’t find them for years. Abigail will be off in university by then, and Hannibal and Will will be happily spending the rest of their lives in a castle in Lithuania!”

Alana doesn’t shrink away from Procel’s tone. “I don’t do anything but keep you updated. Please…” she looks at Procel with such agony and regret. “Save Abigail.”

The call ends and Procel screams in frustration.

~~~

The next day, Annabelle spends lunch with the Lecters, and she not-so-subtly suggests the Carribean as an ideal vacation spot. She lists several airlines, names a few friends, and even bluntly tells them to leave Florence for a while, but Hannibal doesn't budge.

"I have a project at the university, right now," Hannibal says not-so-regrettably. "And Will can't afford to leave his students so suddenly. But, maybe in the winter, we could visit. It does sound quite lovely."

She internally screams. *Leave. Leave now. Please. Just… escape what I cannot save you from.*

~~~

"Abigail," she whispers urgently as they walk back to her apartment, Hannibal and Will gone. "Listen to me closely."

"What's wrong?" Abigail asks, putting a hand on Annabelle's arm. "You've been stressed all morning."

"You need to leave," Annabelle whispers quickly. "There are people coming for your fathers. They don't want you. I can't save Hannibal and Will, but I can save you. Please. Leave with me. Tonight. I'll sneak you out and we can drive out of the city. I have a friend who is out of Florence, and he can hide us for a while."

"Who's coming?" Abigail asks, her eyes narrowed and her voice concerned. Concerned but not *panicked.* Annabelle needs Abigail to panic.

"A man named Mason Verger. Jack Crawford. The FBI. Corrupt Italian police," Annabelle says urgently, grasping onto Abigail's arm with a tight grip. "They will not be kind to a little girl living under a cannibal's roof."

“I can’t just leave,” Abigail says, wrenching herself out of Annabelle’s grasp. “Not without my dads. If I tell them what you’ve just told me—”

“They’ll kill me in a heartbeat,” Annabelle snaps. “I’m working with Jack Crawford. Or at least, I’m pretending to. I’m trying to protect you but Hannibal will see me as a threat and get rid of me. You *cannot* tell them what I’ve just told you.”

“But they need to know!”

“But I’d like to stay alive for a little while longer,” Annabelle mutters. “Look, your fathers can survive a hell lot of shitstorms. You cannot. You’ve been protected by the monsters, but this time they can’t save you. Please, let me take you away. We’ll come back for your parents but first, we need to leave.”

“I can’t,” Abigail says again. “I won’t leave them. I need to stay with my family.” She then turns around and walks away, leaving Annabelle alone on the street.

“Dammit!” She shouts, not caring who hears her.

Damn it.

~~~

Annabelle nearly dies, about seven hours later.

She’s doing her evening routine when it happens, the glass of her windows shattering. Her knife is within reach and already in her grip, but fear clutches her heart with greedy hands.

Blood. Skin tearing. Bones breaking.
~~~

A man of heavy build bursts into her room and she screams, stumbling away, her knife tightly grasped in her hand.

"Get away!" She shouts, and she sees cackling men and hears the sounds of her own screams covering the cracks of her bones. *It's a memory, just a memory,* she tells herself. *Just my memories. My nightmares.*

The man steps forward with heavy steps, and she sees a massive fucking meat cleaver in his hand.

Fuck.

He raises his arm and the weapon, and she manages to dive away quickly enough, the blade colliding with her desk instead.

Fuck fuck fuck.

She rolls away and manages to get behind the man, but before she can retaliate with her own attack, her turns and lunges for her again. The blade scrapes her nose and she feels the sharp sting of skin breaking.

Not much meat on her bones, but enough.

She screams again, hoping someone will hear, and she runs to the kitchen with adrenaline bursting in her blood. She hears the heavy *boom boom boom* of the man behind her, but she manages to outrun him. She slams into her kitchen counter and fumbles with the drawers, searching for the weapon.

The man swings again, and she dodges, but not quickly enough. She feels her shoulder's nerves scream as flesh parts just as her hands close around cold metal.

Gotcha.

She whips around and fires the gun in her hand, ignoring her shoulder's protests. She fires once, twice, a third time, a fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh time. She fires again and again and again, until her gun clicks uselessly in her hands and the hulk of a man is bleeding to death on her kitchen floor.

She sinks to her knees and wheezes out a soft cry. Then a hiccup. Then a gasp. Then a sob.

Dammit.

She sobs into her palms, the blood from her nose staining her skin. Her shoulder throbs and screams and stings against the open air, but she makes no move to touch it or bandage it or heal it. She just simply sits there, and cries.

At some point, Mischa falls into a trance of pain and blood and agony. She doesn't know how long she stays in this trance. She feels brief touches of warmth against her cheeks and forehead, a soft voice against in her ear. She remembers whispering Hannibal's name, the word scratching her throat and coaxing blood past her lips. Warmth fills her mouth when she coughs and when she drinks and eats, and after so long, she starts being unable to recognize which is which. Is it blood or is it food? Life or death?

At some point in her trance, the screaming starts.

Voices, horrible voices, reach her ears and suddenly pain fills her. She has been living with pain in her lungs and bones, but this was different. This was the burn of her skin breaking, her muscles breaking, her bones splitting. She probably screamed, forcing sound through her ragged throat and blood flecking the air.

She doesn't know how long she's there on the floor, wailing like a child into her hands. She doesn't know how long the memories plague her for. She is the sister of a murderer, a follower of death, and yet she is so terrified of the blood. Of the pain. Of the death.

Hannibal could only love someone shrouded in death. Someone like Will. Someone like Abigail. Killers. He would never love someone… so weak. So negatively affected by the death.

Be strong. Face the blood. Face the death. Revel in it. This is your heritage.

Minutes or hours later, the door is bursting open, and much lighter footsteps enter the apartment.

"Mischa!"

She manages to look up, and suddenly she sees Abigail Hobbs staring at her, worry written all over her face. Abigail kneels in front of Mischa, not touching her, but looking for wounds and blood. Her eyes find Mischa's bloody shoulder and hands.

"I'm so sorry," Abigail whispers, covering her mouth to prevent a sob as she kneels in front of Mischa. "I'm so so sorry."

Mischa scrunches her face in confusion. "Why?" she croaks out. Why would Abigail apologize?

"Hannibal, he—" Abigail begins to say. "He sent the man to kill you."

Mischa understands. Hannibal's hand was forced. "You told him about Jack."

Abigail sobs. "I'm so sorry, I never should have, I should have listened to you, I shouldn't have ever told them, I'm so sorry."

Mischa shakes her head gently. “It’s okay. You wanted to save them. Like I wanted to save you.”

You were supposed to leave.

More footsteps, heavier this time.

“Abigail!”

Will and Hannibal come into view, and Mischa suddenly can’t take it anymore. Suddenly, it’s too much. Her name, her family, her death… she can’t keep it inside. She can’t keep carrying around the weight of the Lecter name on her own.

“Hannibal,” she whispers, staggering onto her feet. Abigail moves to help her, but Mischa waves her off.

“Ms DuBois,” Hannibal says. His voice is cold, almost bored. But his eyes find the body and she sees a pleased expression. “You’re alive.”

You made him proud.

“Please,” she pleads. “My name is Mischa.”

Hannibal looks at her with such rich, dark, alluring eyes. “I know.”

“Mischa Lecter,” she whispers, the words so softly spoken but clearly hear through the apartment and its inhabitants.

Please. Love me. Embrace me. Say my name and call me beloved.

Hannibal's eyes harden, and any warmth or pride in his eyes drowns in the cold. It's as if he expected her words but prayed that it wasn't true. "No."

Tell me you love me.

"Please," she whispers. "I'm your sister." She steps forward, and Hannibal steps back.

You're scared of me. Scared of me. Scared of my eyes and the name on my lips.

Hannibal looks at her, his eyes pained, perhaps once loving, now cold and unforgiving. "You're not my sister."

"But I am!" She pleads, stumbling forward and breaching Hannibal's breathing space. "It's me, Mischa."

"You're not her," Hannibal whispers, the words softly spoken but cutting deep into her. "I would know my own flesh and blood, and you are not that."

Chapter End Notes

LEAVE A COMMENT AND TELL ME WHAT YA THINK!

IS MISCHA REALLY MISCHA? IS HANNIBAL IN DENIAL? IS SOMEONE GONNA DIE???

Mwuhahahaha I love all of you guys thank you so much for sticking with this fic.

The Lure and the Lamb

Chapter Summary

> Hannibal nods and moves forward, his hand still wrapped around Annabelle's wrist to hold her close. "If, for whatever reason, you must choose between saving Abigail's or Will's life," Hannibal whispers urgently, his voice only reaching her ears. "Save Will."

Chapter Notes

> Hehehe
>
> CLIMAX CHAPTER
>
> I know this has taken me literal months, but I hope this is worth it!! My mental health recently has plummeted, Coronavirus is fucking up my studies, and I'm a generally lazy person, so I'm not surprised by how long it took me to churn this out. There are probably a shit ton of typos, but I just really want to post. I've taken long enough. I'll edit it tomorrow.
>
> But! Enough of that, enjoy the next depressing and really really really packed chapter of The Devil's Design. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Dad," Abigail says quietly after she's dropped Annabelle - *Mischa* - off. "I need to talk to you."

"Yeah?" Will says, looking up from the stack of paper's he's grading. "What is it?"

"It's about Annabelle," she says. "Mischa."

His eyes narrow. "What about her?"

Abigail looks down and begins debating the pros and cons of telling Will what Mischa told her. Jack Crawford is coming for them. Someone named Mason Verger is coming for them. A bounty is onWill and Hannibal's heads. They're not safe. If Mischa had warned them all, wouldn't it be proof of her loyalty to them? Proof that she wants to help them?

She clears her throat and looks back up at Will, who's waiting patiently for her to find the words.

"Mason Verger and Jack Crawford," she whispers before she can chicken out. Their safety always comes first. Mischa wants to help them. Will will see that. He has to. She swallows heavily and wrings her hands. "They're coming to Florence. They know we're here."

Will blinks and stands up suddenly, moving towards her. "How do you know?" He demands.

"Mischa told me," Abigail says, wringing her hands and backing away from Will on instinct. His rage means death, in her experience. "She told me that she's pretending to work with Jack Crawford so she can protect us, protect me, but that you'd kill her as soon as you found out and—"

"We have to leave," Will whispers, fear in his eyes. Fear which slowly transforms into his quiet, simmering rage. "We have to get out of here." He begins to move towards the phone - to call Hannibal at work - but he pauses, his hand over the phone. "We have to get *you* out of here." He turns back to her. She can see the beginnings of a plan forming in his mind as his brows furrow. "Why didn't Mischa tell us?"

Abigail shakes her head. "She said that you'd kill her. That you'd see her as a threat."

"Then she told you to tell us?" Will asks, his eyes furrowing further in confusion.

"No," Abigail says. "She told me… she asked for me to leave. With her. To run away. She said that Hannibal and you could survive this, but not me."

Will stills, and looks back to the phone. “She has a point,” he admits softly. “Hannibal and I… we’re used to this. We create this.” He looks back at her for a moment. “Mischa—”

Abigail suddenly sees visions of Mischa’s body strung up, hanging from a cross, her body bleeding from the stab wounds that came from antlers. *A sacrificial lamb.* “Dad—”

“I won’t hurt her,” Will says, picking up the phone and dialing Hannibal’s number. “She’s just trying to do what I plan to.”

Abigail nods, trusting Will, and returns to her room. Will keeps his word. Will won’t lie to her. He won’t hurt her. He won’t hurt Mischa. She stares at her own phone, wondering if she should text Mischa, but she decides against it. Will said he wouldn’t hurt her.

Will is good.

~~~

“Jack is coming,” Will says into the phone once Hannibal picks up. “So is Mason.”

“Hello, Will,” Hannibal says, a bit flustered at the sudden burst of news coming from Will. But he isn’t surprised. It was only a matter of time. “So it begins. How did you find out? Did Pazzi tell you?”

“No,” Will mutters and casts a glance towards Abigail’s room. “Abigail told me.”

“Abigail?” There is clear confusion in Hannibal’s voice. “How did she find out?”

“Mischa told her,” Will says. “Mischa worked with Jack, to get closer to us, and she’s trying to get Abigail to safety.”
~~~

“Hence all of her comments about sudden vacation this morning.”

“Yes.” Will sighs.

Hannibal is silent for a moment on the other end of the phone. “The friend I told you about - he is in Florence and can dispose of Mischa within 24 hours.”

“Yeah, about that—” Will begins, but he is cut off.

“Mischa is a threat to our safety,” Hannibal states. “Abigail says that Mischa worked with Jack to find us and to help us, but I doubt it’s true. This would not be the first time Jack has used a double agent.”

“Last time didn’t end well for him,” Will reminds Hannibal, thinking back to the bloodied kitchen tiles.

“And Jack Crawford is a desperate man who just buried his wife,” Hannibal says, a little too cheerfully for Will’s taste. “We cannot take any risks.”

“Mischa could help us,” Will says firmly. “It’s obvious that Abigail is her focus. If we let Mischa take Abigail away, we can then stay and handle Jack and Mason.”

“And let Mischa take Abigail to some distant island? Back to the US, where Abigail’s face is known?”

“Abigail is innocent,” Will whispers, closing his eyes for a brief moment. “Abigail is innocent.”

“She killed Nicholas Boyle,” Hannibal states. “She is—”

Will finishes the sentence for him. “The captive of two cannibals and a victim of Stockholm syndrome.” He takes a deep breath, flexing the hand not holding the phone. His palms are cold with sweat. “She is innocent, Hannibal. She’s a child.”

It’s not her fault that she loves you so, Will. It’s Garret Jacob Hobbs’. Or yours. Or is it mine?

Hannibal pauses. “The world will not be kind to her, Will. Mischa will only be able to protect her for so long.”

“Long enough for us to fight Jack, Mason and go get her.”

“Will,” Hannibal says, and the name is fond and warm on his tongue. “We may not survive this.”

Will bites his lips and shuffles his stance. “We will.” *You can’t kill what’s already dead.* “We can survive anything.”

Everything? Even me?

Will can almost imagine the slight lift of Hannibal’s eyebrows, the disbelieving look on his face, prompting Will to speak more.

“If we could survive each other, I’m pretty damn sure we can survive Mason Verger,” Will mutters, smiling ruefully. A bitter laugh rests on his lips.

“We love each other, Will,” Hannibal whispers, his voice scratchy through the phone and unaccompanied by the wind of his breath on Will’s skin. “Although, I’m fairly sure that love makes everything more dangerous,” he says in afterthought.

Will smiles sadly, and he knows Hannibal is imagining the same smile.

“Let my associate take care of Mischa, and we’ll leave as soon as possible. I have another friend - in Germany, I’m afraid - who can help us leave within a day or two.”

“What happened to killing her ourselves? To cooking us her heart?” Will asks, almost laughing bitterly. “I thought that was the fate you had in mind for Mischa if she were to betray us.”

Hannibal sighs. “I would, my dear boy, but we do not have the time. Perhaps letting my friend kill her is a mercy.”

Will huffs out a disbelieving breath. “Your ‘friend’ is probably a murderer with an ax and a tendency to go overboard with the butchering.”

There is silence on the other side of the phone.

“Hannibal,” Will says. “Please tell me your friend is not an ax murderer and a tendency to go overboard with the butchering.”

“A machete, for the record.”

Will groans. “Sometimes I hate it when I’m right.”

“A curse, I’m sure.” Hannibal chuckles. “But please, Will, let us do things my way. Let me protect you.”

Will nods reluctantly, knowing that Hannibal’s plans typically work out. “Fine. We do it your way.” He rubs the bridge of his nose. “But I’ll kill you if you fail.” Funny thing is, he isn’t sure if he actually would kill Hannibal. If Abigail dies, what would Will do? Would he still run into Hannibal’s open, bloody arms?

Or pull him off a cliff?

"I will protect you both," Hannibal says firmly. "I will not fail you."

~~~

When Hannibal comes home, Abigail is in her room and Will is waiting for him in the living room.

"Hannibal," Will whispers when he steps into the room all calm and collected.

"Will," Hannibal says in reply, a small smile on his lips as he steps towards Will. "Mysmalis." His hands curve around Will's jaw and skull, pulling him close for a gentle kiss. Will kisses him with desperation, imagining worlds where they did not escape from the FBI, worlds where Abigail died mere feet away from him, worlds where Hannibal died in his arms.

"You're shaking, Will," Hannibal whispers against trembling lips.

"I'm scared," Will whispers.

You're terrified of waking up. Of waking up to find Abigail in a pool of her own blood and your bodies at the bottom of the se a.

"Don't be," Hannibal whispers, pressing more kisses against Will's lips and cheeks. "I am here. We are safe. Nothing will harm us."

"Make me forget," Will whisper back, his voice rougher as his hands find purchase in the lapels of Hannibal's jacket. "Make me excited for the blood, not terrified of it."
~~~

Remind our dear William of his lust for destruction.

Hannibal's eyes darken and he slots his body more firmly against Will's. "It will not be our blood spilling tonight," he murmurs into Will's ear. "If a single drop of your blood falls, it will be because I allowed it." The point is emphasized with a bite on Will's earlobe. "Your blood is mine to spill."

Will trembles in his arms. "Then spill it."

Hannibal's lips slam against Will, claiming and dragging the sweetest sounds past quivering lips. Their feet stumble through the living room for a few moments, but then the memory of a hundred nights comes back to their bodies, remembering the way to move through the house without needing to separate their lips. Conjoined, in every sense of the word.

"We have to be quiet," Hannibal murmurs, almost casually as he bites into the skin below Will's jaw. "Abigail is still in the house, and we can't very well send her off to Mischa's."

"Then hurry the fuck up and stop teasing," Will mutters as he drags cloth off Hannibal and claws at buttons.

Hannibal bites again, his crooked teeth dragging against rough skin. "I am in control, right now, Will," he whispers. "You want to forget. I will make you forget. But you have to *submit* ."

Hannibal rarely ever raised his power over Will, rarely tipped the scales in his own favor. Hannibal found thrill in submitting to Will physically and mentally. It was addicting, the way Will snarled as he gained control, the way Will was a kind yet merciless lover when he was inside Hannibal.

But not tonight.

Tonight, Will is desperate and clumsy and he fumbled for control. Hannibal will not have that. Tonight, Will will submit.

"Lay on the bed, on your back," Hannibal said softly. When Will failed to respond, Hannibal dug his hands into Will's hips. "Quickly, my love."

Will scrambled to obey.

"Spread your legs," Hannibal says, the tone fit for ordering a glass of wine. Once Will obeyed silently, Hannibal continues in the same tone. "You will not touch yourself. Hands above your head."

"I thought I was the cop," Will mutters.

A sharp slap cuts his left ankle, and Will rolls his eyes. "Do not speak. Not yet."

Hannibal undresses completely and settles between Will's open legs. "Submit to me, my dear Will." He leans forward and drapes himself over Will, their bodies barely touching. "Give yourself to me."

There is no longer the desperate mantra of 'I am the lure' in Will's mind. There is no pleading gasp for mercy as Hannibal makes love to him. There are no dark shadows lurking in the back of his mind.

I am the lure, Will thinks to himself. *The willing lure.*

Hannibal is beautiful as he plucks pleasure from Will's body, like a harpsichord being tuned.

No, you are not that. You are not a lure. Not anymore. Lures lead their victims into cruel fates. This is not cruel.

This is love.

Will doesn't think about Mischa, Abigail, Jack, Mason, Alana, or Margot as he makes love with Hannibal. He thinks about the taste of copper in his mouth after killing - *the Dragon snarling at his throat and whimpering as he died* - and the warmth of the blood on his hands - *Hannibal holding him and him holding Hannibal as they look at each other with such adoration and peace* . He thinks about Hannibal, about killing with Hannibal, and about its beauty. *The wind rushing past their skin as they fall.*

~~~

"Is Mischa going to help us?" Abigail asks later that evening, the warmth of the hearth lighting the room. They're sitting there as a family, reading and drawing together. Abigail is curled into a protective ball in the single-seater couch, and Will and Hannibal sit on opposite ends of the lounge chair, their feet brushing ever so slightly. The atmosphere was calm, Will's stress soothed by Hannibal's steady touches, and Abigail sat there thinking they were safe. And they are. All but Mischa.

Will and Hannibal exchange a look when Abigail breaks that comforting atmosphere, and Abigail narrows her eyes as the rest of it shatters.

"What did you do?" Abigail demands, uncurling from her position on the couch to stand and glare at Will. She has not enough courage to stare Hannibal down, but just enough to face Will. They watch her sway slightly with the sudden rush of blood to her head, her left foot asleep. "What happened?"

"What we thought best to do," Hannibal says calmly, rising to his feet and walking leisurely over to Abigail. He places a heavy but kind hand on her shoulder. "We will be safe." His touch is meant to steady her, to calm her, and to remind her of her place.

"And what about Mischa?" Abigail snaps, moving sharply away from Hannibal's touch. *She recognizes the touch of a monster.* "Is she safe?"
~~~

“She knew the dangers of interacting with us,” Will says, clasping his hands together and staring at the floor. His voice is fatherly and kind, but it’s laced with the faintest hint of regret.

“What did you do?” Abigail asks again, but her voice is softer this time. Quieter, more fearful. Pleading. She sounds more like a child, and it pokes harshly at Will’s parental instincts.

“Mischa will not be helping us in the way she wanted to,” Hannibal says. “And we will leave Florence without her.”

“Is she safe?” Abigail asks, blinking away tears that threaten to spill.

Will and Hannibal exchange another look.

“She will not be surprised,” is all Hannibal says.

Abigail looks up at him, her doe eyes widening in fear and understanding. “You sent someone to kill her.”

“We don't have the time to kill her ourselves or cooperate. We leave tomorrow morning,” Hannibal says, the unspoken ‘and that is final’ ringing through the air.

“You betrayed her!” Abigail shouts, and she steps back quickly with her arms wrapped around herself.

Fear. Fear the wendigo. It does not lurk in the shadows, for you are standing in the midst of its den.

“We were never allies,” Will whispers.

“Nor family,” Hannibal adds. “The three of us are family, Abigail. We must do what is necessary in order to protect this family.”

“Mischa is my friend! Our friend!” Abigail yells, her mouth open in a grimace that prepares itself to become a shout. “When did you send the killer?”

“Mischa is dead by now, Abigail,” Will says softly, finally standing and nearing Abigail. “She’s gone.”

Abigail shakes her head and her lips begin to quiver. “No,” she whispers. “No, no, no you’re lying. You’re lying. She’s not dead. You can’t kill her!” The last words are almost a scream.

“Abigail—”

“No!” She shouts, whirling around to point a shaking finger at Hannibal. “Do not tell me that it is okay that someone else is dead. Do not tell me that killing another one of my friends is okay!” Her whole body trembles like a leaf in a hurricane. Trembling like she’s choking on her own blood. “You killed everyone in my life! Marissa!” She turns to look at Will. “My dad! Nicholas! You won’t have anything in my life that isn’t you!”

And then she’s running towards the door and slamming it. Hannibal and Will move to follow, not too much panic in their movements, but then they hear the locks click.

Will collides with the door and shakes the doorknob. “She locked the door,” he mutters. He glares at Hannibal. “This is your fault, you know.”

Hannibal sighs. “Can you kick the door down? I’d rather not climb out the windows of my own house.”

“Don’t we have another set of keys?” Will asks, staring incredulously at Hannibal. “I doubt she took the other set.”

Hannibal blinks. “You’re right,” he says softly. “I’ll go fetch them.”

“Dumb cannibal,” Will mutters before yelling, “You’ve been eating too many idiots, that’s why your brain is rotting away!”

“Who’s the one picking those idiots, I wonder?” Hannibal calls back.

~~~

Abigail is running. Again. Running from Will. From Hannibal.

To Mischa.

The cobbled streets are unforgiving as her feet pound into them, and they rise and fall and snatch at her trembling legs, trying to trip her. She stumbles many times but she doesn’t stop. She can’t stop. Couples taking romantic evening walks stare at her with curiosity, judgement, annoyance, but all those feelings wash over her like water. She isn’t Will. Those emotions do not grip her and tie her down. She isn’t Hannibal. The emotions are not foreign to her and they are not a game.

When she reaches Mischa’s apartment, the door is open and the lights are off inside.

Please don’t be dead.

She throws herself into the apartment - uncaring of the possible murderer lurking inside - and screams Mischa’s name. There is no response, but black liquid flickers in the moonlight and she sees bodies on the floor. A monster of a man lays crumpled on the floor, blood covering him. In front of him is a kneeling body, flecked with black.
~~~

“Mischa!”

Mishca’s head slowly lifts and her eyes are distant when they fall on Abigail. She’s obviously in shock, and Abigail sees an injury on her shoulder. Blood is all over her hands, and Abigail prays that it’s mostly the man’s.

Shaking with fear and guilt, Abigail falls to her knees in front of Mischa.

“I’m so sorry,” Abigail whispers, covering her mouth to prevent a sob. “I’m so so sorry.”

Mischa scrunches her face in confusion. “Why?” she croaks out.

Abigail chokes out another sob and internally slaps herself for it. She wasn’t the one who just had a near death experience. She isn’t the one bleeding.

“Hannibal, he—” Abigail begins to say. Another sob rises but she chokes it back down. *Be strong.* “He sent the man to kill you.”

Understanding seems to dawn on Mischa, but there’s no anger there. She simply blinks a few times and slowly nods. “Hannibal’s hand was forced,” she whispers, barely loud enough for Abigail to hear. More clearly, she says, “You told him about Jack.”

Abigail sobs. “I’m so sorry, I never should have, I should have listened to you, I shouldn’t have ever told them, I’m so sorry.”

I am sorry death follows me and takes everyone I love. I’m sorry that I love you. I’m sorry that Hannibal cannot stand my love for anyone else.

Mischa shakes her head gently. “It’s okay. You wanted to save them. Like I wanted to save you.”

You tried to save me and I nearly killed you, Abigail wants to say. But she can’t. the words are frozen in her lungs and will not pass her lips.

Heavy footsteps follow her, and Abigail briefly closes her eyes to… gather strength? To pray? She doesn’t know.

“Abigail!” It’s Will’s voice. Hannibal must be behind Will, silent as he observes the blood and the carnage.

Something seems to change in Mischa. Her eyes clear and she becomes more present as she lifts her eyes to Hannibal’s shadow behind Abigail.

“Hannibal,” she whispers, staggering onto her feet. Abigail moves to help her, but Mischa waves her off.

“Ms DuBois,” Hannibal says. His voice is cold, almost bored. But Abigail knows he has that happy look in his eyes as he looks at the corpse at their feet. “You’re alive.”

“Please,” Mischa pleads. “My name is Mischa.”

Abigail hovers around Mischa, wanting to hold her, but also being painfully aware of the blood and injuries.

“I know.”

Will gently wraps a hand around Abigail’s wrist and pulls her away. Abigail follows him. Will is safe. Will can protect her. Will can stop Hannibal.

“Mischa Lecter,” Mischa whispers, the words so softly spoken but clearly heard through the apartment and its inhabitants.

Abigail blinks at Mischa, frozen.

Mischa Lecter.

Honestly, it explains a lot.

“No.” Hannibal’s voice is cruel and unforgiving, and Abigail instinctively flinches.

“Please,” Mischa whispers. “I’m your sister.” She steps forward, and Hannibal steps back.

Will grabs Abigail more firmly and pulls her further away from them. From the Lecters. They retreat into the shadows, and she can feel the complete tension in Will’s body. He’s surprised, but it makes sense. It explains a lot of things. Her obsession with Hannibal. The fondness in her eyes. Her affection towards Abigail.

“You’re not my sister,” Hannibal says.

Abigail wants to slap him.

“But I am!” Mischa pleads, stumbling forward and breaching Hannibal’s breathing space. “It’s me, Mischa.”

“You’re not her,” Hannibal whispers, the words softly spoken but cutting deep into her. “I would know my own flesh and blood, and you are not that.”

Will and I are your flesh and blood, we are your family. Mischa is your family. Look at everything she's done for you. Look at the blood she's spilled for you.

"Please…" Mischa whispers, and Abigail watches her entire soul crumble at the cold, unloving gaze Hannibal gives her.

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I would know my own flesh and blood.

"No!" She shouts, pushing forwards and grabbing Hannibal by the lapels of his jacket. She is intimately aware of the dangers of attacking him, threatening him, hell, being rude to him, but she doesn't care. She doesn't care if she bleeds, she needs to make him see. "Why don't you believe me?"

"I wonder who sent you, or perhaps you sent yourself," Hannibal muses to himself, not reacting to her grasp on him. He sees Will move to stop her, defend him, but he looks at Will and he promptly stops.

"No one sent me, I sent myself!" She yells.

"What do you have to gain by pretending to be my sister?" Hannibal asks, a smile entering his expression like a knife. "My wealth? My name? My protection?"

"I'm not pretending to be anything!" She hisses, finally releasing Hannibal and staggering backwards. Her hair has fallen around her face, frizzled and angry, framing the desperation in her eyes. "I am Mischa Lecter, your goddamn sister!"

Hannibal sneers coldly, stepping forward and ready to lash out against her with his tongue. The words are perched there, ready to slip out and stab into her, but he pauses. He doesn't utter the words: *do not speak of what does not belong to you* . He pauses. He looks at her. The color of her eyes, the width of her lips. She is small, underfed as a child, and she clearly has
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trauma. Her skin is covered in scars of varying depths and her leg is gone. Would a person do this to themselves to merely trick Hannibal into believing they are family?

Would someone do this to her to gain his trust?

It hits him suddenly, but when it does, he's certain. She's not lying. She wholly believes the words she's throwing at his feet. In her heart, mind, and soul, she believes she is Mischa Lecter.

"Everyone told me you were dead," she whispers. "In the orphanage. Told me that the entire Lecter line perished." She laughs bitterly. "After enough years, people stopped believing I was a Lecter.

"But I am. I am a Lecter. After… the winter. The men. After they hurt me.. I… I was found. By Ieva. She used to work for the family, as a maid, before Father fired everyone. She found me and managed to save me. I almost didn't make it. But I did. I survived.

"I was raised in an orphanage. Never was adopted. No one had the money to adopt anyone, and by the time the war was over, I was too old to find a new family. I was expected to make my own. I left Lithuania purely by luck. I snuck on a train and went to Germany. Learned some new languages. Maintained my piano. Got a proper prosthetic." She references her leg. "Eventually, I started looking for you. I went to Italy - like you always wanted to - as a musician, and I heard stories about Il Mostro. A killer. A killer who made death into art. I managed to find photos - I was friends with a paper boy who kept all of the interesting news clips - and I knew it was you. I knew you were a killer. And I knew that I could find you.

"I became a nurse, and managed to travel to the States. I assumed you'd go there, it's big and there's a lot of opportunity. I… looked for you. Never found you. But… I found someone else." A sad smile fills her face. "His name was Dean. He wasn't anything special, but he… we fit. We were good for each other. He was abused as a kid and lost his sight when his dad punched him too hard. We were happy together, and I forgot about searching for you. I picked up psychology, got married, had a kid… it was good. It was really good.

"But he died - no murder, no tragedy. Just a car accident. It was late and people were drunk. Gail - my baby girl - and I were lucky. Dean… died on the operating table. So I was a single mom, worked as a nurse and at a museum, and was trying to get a psychology degree. My

neighbor babysitter Gail a lot. I was tired all of the time, but… I was alive. I had a life. I had a family. I wasn't spending my entire existence looking for you. I was… free. I was my own person.

"But then… Gail… she…"

Will is there, but he isn't. He's standing there, with Abigail a moment away from him, but he isn't there. There is only Hannibal and a little girl pleading to be heard and loved. She speaks softly, kindly, and agony seems to drown her voice. Years and years of grief and pain fills her voice, spilling over and licking at the seams of Hannibal's person suit. Begging to be let in.

"Gail died. Some bastard motherfucker of a killer. He killed my baby. Strung her up like a puppet.

"So I caught him. Slept with a police officer to get access to the case file, started hunting the bastard down, and the Puppeteer was caught and put behind bars in a month.

"I don't think about Gail, often. She was my failure in this life. I forget too often that Death follows me everywhere. Gail is proof of that. I let myself forget who I am - my name - and I let myself escape the family name. The death.

"I am a Lecter. I am your sister. And after Gail died, I spent the rest of my time trying to find you. I took on so many different names, went to so many countries, and became so many different people. I was part of a drug cartel, at one point. I ended up killing them all when I found out that our money was being used to support a trafficking ring. Burned them. I was a pimp - never pretty enough to dance but smart enough to sell - and then a cop. A pianist. A psychologist. A mafia bodyguard.

"I've been a lot of things. But I've always been your sister." The tears on her face are dry and she gently nears Hannibal. "Please. I found you, in Baltimore, when the Ripper story became popular. I was too scared to approach you immediately. And when I finally grew the balls to do so, your kitchen was filled with dead people and paramedics.

“Please. I don’t need to be a part of your life. Just… acknowledge me. Believe me. Tell me that you believe me and that I am your sister.” Tension fills her body again, and she watches Hannibal with fear in her eyes. Hannibal could easily kill her right here and now. Reach up and strangle her, snap her neck. He could tell her *no* and that she is a liar, an imposter.

He could destroy her.

“Tell me something only Mischa would know,” Hannibal says, the venom in his voice gone, and he knows that she is relieved. Her entire body seems to sag in relief as the fear leaves her.

He believes me. He wants to believe me. He sees me.

“I’m scared of thunderstorms,” Mischa says, looking at him hopefully, shyly. “I went to your room as a child, slept in your bed when I was scared, and you let me.”

Hannibal does not speak, and the silence encourages her to continue.

“I was scared of what would happen when I grew up, when I wasn’t allowed to be scared of the thunder anymore. You told me that it didn’t matter how old I grew, I could always come to you when I was scared. You promised to protect me. When our home became nothing more than a rotting corpse of dead mothers and neglectful fathers, you promised to give me everything. Fine wine and opera.”

Hannibal softens at her words, the seams cracking under her touches. He opens, but he does not speak. The silence invites her deeper.

“You killed the men who killed our father,” she says, stepping forward, as if approaching a rabid, wounded animal. “You killed them quickly, but not kindly. You didn’t kill them to avenge father.” Another step is taken, and Hannibal makes no move to stop her. She is entering his territory, his history, his mind, and he lets her. He invites her into the darkness, for the first time in his life, allowing himself to hope. “You killed them to protect me,” she continues. “And watch the way blood stained your hands.”

He stills, breath gone.

“You killed our mother,” she whispers, stepping forward again. “I didn’t realize it at first, but it became clear when I was at the orphanage. You killed her to spare everyone the pain of watching her die slowly as she choked on her own blood.”

Suddenly, Hannibal is snapping shut, closing everything off and she senses it. She feels the seams ripping away from her and sewing themselves back up, the needle pricking her fingers which did not flee quick enough.

Hannibal speaks, slowly. “I did not kill my mother.”

She stills, her body backing away as her feet stay planted before him. “She didn’t die from the sickness.”

“Did you see the body?” Hannibal asks. “Did you see the evidence?”

Mischa is silent for a moment. “I changed her sheets. The blood and spit on her pillow. I helped Ieva wash them.”

“Did you see the body?” He asks again.

“I saw the stain, the blood and saliva focused on one spot of her pillow, as if it had been held over her until she lost breath,” she almost spits. “Ieva saw the bruises around her throat.”

“You would take an old maid’s words?” Hannibal whispers, his chin tilting up and his eyes unforgiving.

“She *saved* me, Hannibal,” she snarls. “She did what you failed to do!”

Silence booms around them, shackling her in her place before Hannibal. The strength of his gaze almost forces her to her knees. She would willingly go, if he asked.

"Don't talk to me of failure," he whispers, his words curling around her. His eyes grin cruelly as he speaks the next words. "You, a mother who unstrung the body of her own daughter from the ceiling, knowing where the blame lies. You, a woman living in a web so thick of lies that you've lost your identity. You, a child who burned in the snow."

"I'm here, aren't I?" She snaps in return. "I found you, didn't I? I killed people for you, didn't I? I bled for you, didn't I? I fucking died for you, didn't I?!"

"You are not my sister," Hannibal repeats, stepping forward, into her breathing space. Into the space around her that welcomes him with open arms. "You are not Mischa Lecter."

She laughs shrilly, the sound piercing the air and her own lungs. She steps back with the heavy metal of her foot slamming into the tiled floor, and she stares at Hannibal with years of pain. "Am I?" She throws off her jacket and tugs off her shirt, revealing scars across her back and stomach. Her eyes stay on Hannibal. "Am I?" Her stomach is not smooth and does not fold naturally with the fat - the skin bunches and folds with burns and crude cuts stretching across her abdomen. "Am I?" She pulls down her trousers next, the fabric catching on her plastic leg, ripping the seams. They fall next to her shirt and jacket. Her left leg, from just above the knee and down, is gone and replaced with white plastic and steel. Her thighs and calf are shrunken and wounded, wrapped in old, discolored skin. "Am I?!"

She is not beautiful, standing there before Hannibal and demanding to be loved.

"Do you think I would put myself through the pain and blood and loss and give myself these scars… just to fool you? Don't put yourself on a pedestal so high, Hannibal," she says, her voice high and carrying insanity. She laughs bitterly and shivers as the air stabs into her. "I would do anything to not be Mischa Lecter." A broken sobs lurches out of her chest, and she can't contain it. "I would do anything to not be your sister…"

Abigail is the one who breaks first. She escapes Will's embrace and surrounds Annabelle with warm arms. She sobs again, louder this time, and clutches Abigail's shirt.

“It’s okay,” Abigail whispers, rocking comfortingly. Her hands rub gentle circles into Annabelle’s damaged skin. “It’s okay.”

Hannibal does not move to comfort her, but he doesn’t move away. Instead, he stands there and chastises himself for daring to hope. Mischa is dead. He remembers the taste of her flesh on his tongue and the stillness of her corpse. If he were someone else, someone with uncontrollable emotions and a tendency for madness, he would doubt his memory.

But he is a creature that feels no such thing as guilt, and he knows the truth of his sister’s death.

“Annabelle,” Will says, and the word is kindly spoken.

Annabelle, not Mischa.

Hannibal knows that the woman kneeling before him is an imposter, but she doesn’t.

He lifts his gaze from Annabelle, and he meets Will’s eyes. Unspoken words pass between them, and understanding. Will may not realize the truth about Annabelle, but he knows that Hannibal does.

“Apologise,” Will says suddenly, and the word is meant for Hannibal. “Apologise and explain.”

Abigail lifts her head to watch her fathers but she is tightly holding Annabelle and ready to defend the broken woman. “You know the truth, don’t you?” She whispers, and Hannibal is surprised once again by her insightfulness. Truly a girl worthy of being Will’s daughter.

“Annabelle,” Hannibal begins, and his voice has become soft and a balm against the old scars on Annabelle’s skin.

“Why don’t you believe me?” She asks, trembling in Abigail’s arms. “I’m not—” she breaks off with a sob. “I’m not *lying.* ”

“I know,” Hannibal says gently. He gives Abigail a commanding glance, and her arms around Annabelle loosen. Hannibal kneels before her and does something almost… impulsively. He opens his arms. “I know you are not lying.”

Annabelle lifts her head and stares at the open arms.

Acceptance. Love. Belonging.

She sobs as she collapses into Hannibal’s embrace, and steady, strong arms envelop her as she shakes. Hannibal’s touch is firm and unwavering as it guides her head beneath his chin and her frail body against his chest. He radiates warmth and protection.

For the first time in years, in too many years, she feels safe.

They kneel there together for some time, listening to Annabelle cry against Hannibal’s body. The hiccups of her wet wails ring in Will’s ears and remind him of Abigail. The room is cold and the body and blood are cooling around them, but no one makes a move. They stay there, amidst the death and broken furniture as Annabelle basks in the embrace she spent her entire life dreaming of.

“Am I not your sister?” She whispers after the sobs have subsided and the tears on her face have dried. Her voice barely escapes the cocoon of Hannibal’s arms, but Will and Abigail hear it.

“No,” Hannibal says, and while it is not unkind, it is unforgivingly blunt. “You are not my sister.”

They all see the shiver that runs through Annabelle, but she does not break into any more tears.

“But… you said that… that I’m not… *lying.* ”

Hannibal takes a deep breath, silent but massive. “I do not know the details, but I believe that you are Ieva’s daughter.”

The room is silent.

“What?” Annabelle whispers. “What do you mean?”

“Ieva, Mischa’s nanny, had a daughter shortly after Mischa was born, and she often kept Mischa company. My parents thought it appropriate for Mischa to have a playmate her age, and so they stayed together for the first few years of their life. After Mischa was old enough to start her education, Ieva’s daughter no longer socialised with Mischa, but she was still in the house. After enough time, she also started working with Ieva in the household, usually the laundry room and cleaning.

“When father began firing all of the servants, he kept Ieva employed, mostly out of pity. Ieva’s child was prone to sickness and Ieva was old. She would have seen many of the inner workings of the Lecter household.

“When Mother died, Ieva and her daughter would have been the ones to change her sheets. They would have seen the bloodied sheets and seen my lingering presence.

“Ieva dreamed big. She whispered stories of riches for her daughter, and often confused Mischa with her own child when they were younger. Ieva was also… not the most stable of mind. She often had arguments with Father, shouting that her child was a Lecter and deserved to be raised as one.

“The strangest thing about her child was not how similar she looked to Mischa or her mother’s mental instability. It was her name - she didn’t have one. I’m assuming Ieva named her child at some point, but after a few years, she only ever referred to her as ‘Mischa,’ mostly to antagonize Father. She kept declaring that she was of Lecter blood, and while I briefly had my doubts, I knew that Ieva was simply a woman who took advantage of her daughter’s blonde hair and maroon eyes.

“I would not put it past Ieva to mutilate her own daughter to convince everyone of her child’s bloodline.”

Annabelle is shaking again, and she doesn’t know if it’s from fear, hatred, or shock.

“Ieva stayed with the family until our last days. She would have known about my sister’s unfortunate fate and been able to replicate it.” Hannibal holds Annabelle a fraction tighter. “I’m sorry.”

Annabelle doesn’t respond.

“You were raised with someone else’s name. You tell me that you are my sister and I know that you are not lying, because this is the truth in your heart. You truly believe you are of Lecter blood. And you’ve certainly bled enough to prove it.”

I’m sorry.

“Ieva is my mother?”

The words are so small, meek. They are murmured by trembling lips as Annabelle grips tightly to the fabric of Hannibal’s bloodstained shirt. The trembling probably is from Annabelle’s shoulder wound, Will realizes, coupled with shock. The blood has stained the front half of Hannibal’s casual shirt and started to dry.

“I believe so. Although, I cannot confirm. All I can confirm is that you are not my sister.”

Annabelle nods slightly as she stares blankly at the red on Hannibal. She's lost so much blood, but Will makes note of the hands staunching the blood. Hannibal has been holding her wounds from the moment he embraced her.

"So… all this time…"

"Ieva was delusional. In a small moment of her clarity, she must have injured you to the extent Mischa was, or at least allowed someone to do so."

"All this time," Annabelle whispers. "I thought… I…"

"I know," Hannibal says. "And you had every right to."

"I was a *child* ," she whispers in horror, and Will sees her body tremble violently. Rage enters her. "She did this to me? She turned me into…?"

"A Lecter," Hannibal. "Christened in our blood."

Annabelle chokes out another sob.

"We need to tend to your wounds," Hannibal whispers. "And give you time to process everything."

They move out of Annabelle's bloodied apartment, Annabelle limp in Hannibal's arms.

Where she belongs, after so many years. The arms of the only person she's ever loved.

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Will's phone is ringing.

Unknown number.

"Who is it?" Abigail asks softly, keeping her voice quiet. Hannibal and Annabelle are in the kitchen as he stitches her up. They can hear her occasional question and the rumbling murmur of Hannibal's response. Will's never seen him so gentle with someone that isn't Abigail or himself.

"I don't know," Will mutters just as he hits *answer* . "Hello?"

"Will?"

It's Jack on the other end of the phone.

"Jack," Will says, loudly enough for everyone in the apartment to hear. He sees Hannibal's hands still for a single moment. Annabelle stares at them in horror.

"Can we meet?" Jack asks, softly and tiredly. Will can imagine him running a hand accords his face. "Just to talk."

"Alone?" Will asks, keeping eye contact with Hannibal.

Jack sighs on the other end of the phone. "Yes. The FBI isn't with me. I'm here alone."

"For what?" Will doesn't voice his disbelief.
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“I would say Hannibal, but it’s less about that,” Jack says. “I’m looking for closure. I met Bella here. I spread her ashes here. I would like to catch Hannibal here.”

Will suppresses a huff. “And you think I’d help you?” *After everything I did to you?*

“No,” Jack admits. “I believe that you’ll do everything in your power to protect your family. I want the death to stop, Will. So do you. Meet me at the Norman Palace. We can talk and figure out the best way to protect Abigail.”

“Did you send Annabelle?” Will asks.

Jack seems a bit thrown off by this. “Agent DuBois?”

“Yes.” *Agent.* “She found us quite a while ago.”

“Oh my god— she isn’t dead, is she?” The sudden grief that fills Jack’s voice is almost enough to make Will pity him. No, it is enough. It’s enough for Will to pity him. Pity isn’t something enjoyable to receive. Jack deserves the fucking pity.

“No,” Will says. “She’s very much alive.” He meets eyes with Annabelle, who looks so much like a lost child that it tugs something deep in Will’s chest.

“I didn’t know what to do so I... I just did what he told me,” she whispers, her voice a broken melody on his ear.

“Where is he?” Will demands once his gun is lowered. Where is the man who did this?

She shakes her head and quivers like a feather in the wind, her lips tugged into a warbling line. Her eyes flick to something behind Will, and his blood goes cold as he realizes who stands behind him. He turns around quickly, staring at Hannibal with wide eyes. He doesn't know what fills him, fear or relief. Perhaps both. Relief at the sight of Hannibal in one piece, but fear, knowing that Hannibal is still here and not running away like he promised.

He hears Jack's sigh of relief, distant, as if through water. "Good. Please keep her alive. I don't need another dead agent on my hands."

Will huffs out a bitter sound as he ignores the vision in his head. "I'm sure."

"Just… please. Meet me there. I'm already there."

"Give me ten minutes," Will says.

"I'll be waiting." The phone hangs up.

Will meets Hannibal's gaze from the kitchen.

"You can't go." Abigail is the first one to speak, moving forward to clutch at Will's arm. "He'll take us away. He'll hurt us."

"There's no threat," Will says as he walks into the kitchen.

Annabelle sits on the counter with Hannibal's hands steadying her swaying body.

"He could be lying," Hannibal says.

“He isn’t,” Will says. “He wants you behind bars, but he doesn’t want to see me and Abigail hurt. He wants to help.”

“How could he help?” Hannibal asks.

“He can take Abigail and Annabelle somewhere safe. You and I then have full range to make our move.”

“To kill Jack?” Annabelle whispers. “Would that be your move?”

“If necessary,” Hannibal admits. “But Abigail is our priority.”

“Of course,” Annabelle mutters, turning her head away.

“I’m going,” Will says, and there is no room for argument in his tone. He meets Hannibal’s gaze. “We play coy, until Abigail and Annabelle are safe.”

Hannibal nods and reaches out a bloody hand to Will. Will takes it and nears Hannibal enough for a chaste kiss.

“Be safe.”

Will nods and leaves.

Mysmalis.

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Will is gone for about five minutes when the police come pouring into the apartment, but they don't follow Jack's orders.

"Mason," Annabelle whispers as soon as the Italian police officers start yelling for Hannibal's surrender. "These are his men."

The bullets fly moments later.

"Pazzi must have tipped them off!" Annabelle yells, but the words are confusing on her tongue.

Since when was Pazzi in the picture?

"Follow me," Hannibal says in a voice far too calm for the bullets flying towards them. He pulls Annabelle into his arms so she can run with his support, and Abigail follows them closely.

They run.

Hannibal has had multiple escape routes planned, providing enough cover for some time. The alleyways are familiar to Hannibal as they run as fast as Annabelle's injuries will allow, and she remembers her own times running down these streets as she searched for Hannibal. The distant sounds of bullets colliding with stone pavements bring them no harm and cause only small amounts of anxiety. Annabelle is safe, with Hannibal beside her. So is Abigail. He will protect them.

Even if she isn't Mischa.

Hannibal grunts softly as Annabelle stumbles and falls into Hannibal's arms. "We have to keep moving," he says softly. "There is no time to rest. Not now. But soon."

She nods. “I know. I’m sorry.”

Abigail is the one comforting her for her wounds, and Hannibal merely pulls her forward. They have to keep running.

Now that Annabelle is… Annabelle, will she still have Hannibal’s protection? He seems perfectly content to risk Abigail’s safety for her slow self, but how long will that last? How soon will it be until Hannibal throws her aside for the wolves to consume?

When they near church, Abigail is first to run in, knowing the catacombs almost as well as Hannibal does. She moves quickly ahead of them and Hannibal tells her to keep moving while he lets Annabelle catch her breath. Abigail nods and runs into the dark labyrinth, her footsteps echoing.

Annabelle moves to take a step forward, unwilling to stay still for too long with Mason right on their tails (or at least, his greed-frenzied bastards), but Hannibal grabs her wrist in a punishing hold and keeps her still.

“You have the resources to help us,” Hannibal states, and she nods in affirmative, wincing at the pain of his grip.

“I can get Jack to help us, as well as brief protection from Mason’s wrath,” she says. She’s like Hannibal, no matter the lack of blood shared between them. She spent years as a lone wolf, gaining the trust of random people who owed her their lives.

Hannibal nods and moves forward, his hand still wrapped around Annabelle’s wrist to hold her close. “If, for whatever reason, you must choose between saving Abigail’s or Will’s life,” Hannibal whispers urgently, his voice only reaching her ears. “Save Will.”

Annabelle stares at Hannibal in shock and her steps falter. His hand on her is the only thing that keeps her moving.

“I thought Abigail was your priority,” she whispers back, her tone almost furious.

“Abigail is Will’s priority,” Hannibal says, and it’s almost bitterly admitted. “He is mine.”

“You’d let her die,” she realizes. “Without hesitation.”

“I would kill her myself,” Hannibal murmurs. “She is my gift to Will. I would not hesitate to take her away if it meant saving Will.”

Or punish him.

“A child,” Annabelle whispers, flooded by images of bloodied kitchen tiles and screaming daughters. “Someone to nurture.”

“She’s only an echo of what I lost,” Hannibal says, his eyes burning into Annabelle. “It does me no great harm to lose echoes.”

“I’m not your priority.” She says it so softly and sadly, but there's no accusation in her tone. “I’m only a tool to save Will.”

But am I not an echo of Will? Mourning the loss of a daughter, manipulated by a puppet master, and forever searching for your love?

“You are an echo of my past,” Hannibal says. “Will is my future.”

Only an echo.

“How romantic,” she mutters, but the hurt bleeds into her voice.

“I will not throw you aside, Annabelle,” Hannibal says, and he can tell that the name burns her. She is Annabelle. Not Mischa. She never was Mischa. “If I wanted to be rid of you so easily, I would have left you to bleed out in your apartment.”

“You’re the reason I’m bleeding out,” Annabelle reminds him.

“I was curious how far you would go to maintain your charade,” Hannibal explains. “For some reason, it never occurred to me that there was no charade. Not like this.”

A surprisingly realistic echo.

“You let yourself hope, though,” Annabelle murmurs. “I saw it in your eyes. The hope. Small hope.”

Hannibal does not respond.

“You miss her,” Annabelle says.

“Of course I do.” It’s a very softly spoken admission. “She was my world, and the reason I made death into an art.”

“Will is your reason, now,” Annabelle observes. “You love him so much.”

More than you could ever love me.

“As much as a monster like me can.”

“The devil was thrown from heaven because he loved God too much,” Annabelle says. “I think you truly love him.”

“And?” Hannibal prompts. “What will you do with this information?”

She smirks playfully, but it doesn’t reach her eyes. “Lament. Mourn for the love you could have given me.”

“Do you truly wish to be loved by something like me?”

“Yes,” she answers immediately. “I have loved you for my entire life. I killed for you. I lived for you. I existed for you. I want nothing more in this life but to be embraced and loved by you.”

Hannibal seems to be shocked by the brutal honesty in her words, but she knows he appreciates it. For all his love of manipulation, he hates being lied to. “Then I am sorry I cannot.”

She shrugs as much as her injury will allow. “I have a feeling I won’t be living for much longer, so that brief moment of your comfort will have to be enough. I don’t need much more.”

“Why will you die soon?” Hannibal whispers, looking ahead as they move through the maze.

“Mason is coming for you. Jack is coming for you. And I lost a shit ton of blood. I’ll probably die protecting you.” She smiles ruefully at him. “Please be kind to me in death. Honor me. If you can.”

Like you honored Mischa.

Hannibal doesn’t know why he says his next words. “I will.”

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“I wasn’t sure if you’d come,” Jack says when Will enters the chapel, the weight of his gun heavy on his belt. If it does come to killing Jack, Will wants to be merciful. Jack is… most certainly not innocent, but he’s no monster. He does not deserve the intimate rage Will gives in his kills.

“You said you could protect Abigail,” Will says calmly as he stands next to Jack, who is sitting in the front row of pews and staring up at the stained glass. Will glances at the skull on the floor.

Jack sighs and nods, handing a manilla envelope to Will. When Will opens it, he sees several documents related to different laws, all of them with Abigail’s name on them.

“Most of these will work, offering a hell lot of protection,” Jack says, turning his head to look at the envelope in Will’s hands but not at Will’s eyes. Ironic.

Will nods and sits down besides Jack. “Thank you.” He means it.

Jack chuckles. “Abigail is far from innocent, I know that. But she’s a kid.” Jack glances again at Will, this time at his chin. “She doesn’t deserve the hell you and Hannibal stir up wherever you go.”

“What hell have we stirred up here?” Will asks, putting the envelope aside and clasping his hands together. “Florence has been peaceful. No terribile murders, grand dinner theatres, or insane unofficial FBI agents.”

“Hell likes to follow you two, Will, don’t play dumb,” Jack says, glaring at Will’s chin. “Mason Verger is apparently trying to kill you and Hannibal.”
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Will huffs out a small chuckle and smirks. “Torture, is the better term.”

A long dinner table, Will and Hannibal sat before Mason with their hands bound. Hannibal is grinning ear to ear, but Will is tired. Tired of the death. Tired of the pain. And also recovering from being drugged by Hannibal.

Hannibal will be cooked. Made into a gourmet meal by unskilled hands that Will knows Hannibal is itching to perfect.

Jack turns fully to Will, and when he lifts his eyes to Jack, he meets his eyes. All he sees is grief and an aching exhaustion.

“Hannibal will live, if we catch him here. If we get him before Mason,” Jack says. His tone is almost pleading.

“Who’s ‘we,’ Jack? The FBI? Because it’s certainly not you and I,” Will reminds him. “Hannibal isn’t scared of Mason Verger. At most, he’s… disgusted. Mason poses no great threat.”

“Will,” Jack says in the same tone he used all those years ago, when Will was playing the role of fine china only brought out for special murders. “Let me help you.”

“You will help Abigail,” Will says. “Hannibal and I will go.”

Jack sighs. “You know I can’t let that happen.”

“Just try to stop us, Jack,” Will snaps, standing up suddenly. He’s tired of this, tired of running. He was supposed to be *free* from this. “You’ll die trying.”

“Then so be it,” Jack says quietly. “I have nothing else.”

Will scoffs. “I know. But I have a lot to live for, believe it or not.”

“Hannibal?” Jack asks, standing to face Will. “Is that what you’re living for? Will, he is a monster. He framed you, tried to kill you, drove you insane, and—”

“And he loves me,” Will says, instantly regretting how fucking cheesy it sounds. But it’s true. “Hannibal is the only person who sees me and loves me for what I truly am.”

“He only loves you when you’re willing to kill for him,” Jack says softly. It’s almost kind, if it wasn’t drowned in so much pity. “Don’t forget that.”

“And you only cared for me when I was willing to die for your cause,” Will throws back. “Hannibal may have lied about my encephalitis but you were the one throwing me into every single murder scene. You were the one emotionally abusing me into destroying myself to catch the Ripper.”

“So it’s my fault that you’re in love with the fucking Chesapeake Ripper?” Jack asks, raising his brows before pursing his lips in thought. “Is that what you're saying.”

“You know it’s not,” Will mutters. “You are no saint, Jack. Don’t go pointing fingers.”

Jack sighs. “Fine. Run away with Hannibal. I’ll still chase you. But let me protect Abigail, let me give her a chance to escape her father’s world.”

Will nods. “Alright.”

Footsteps are heard in the distance, echoing, and Will panics for a moment before realizing that they belong to Abigail.

Jack and Will turn to face the inner entrance of the chapel, and the door opens to reveal Abigail, heaving for breath.

“Dad,” she murmurs before running forward and colliding into Will’s embrace. She hugs him tightly before stepping back to glare at Jack. “Agent Crawford.”

“Ms Hobbs,” Jack greets.

“Where’s Hannibal?” Will asks her, and she glances at the door she came through. “He’ll be here soon; he’s helping Annabelle walk.”

“Agent DuBois?” Jack asks, and Abigail is momentarily still before nodding.

“She’s injured. But alive,” Abigail says, glancing again to the door. “Italian police came for us,” Abigail says to Will. “Apparently they’re working for Mason, but we got away. I’m not sure how long it’ll take for them to find us.”

Will nods. “You and Annabelle are going with Jack.”

Abigail frowns. “What?”

“Jack will give you protection, and Annabelle will make damn sure that it happens.” Will stares firmly at her, trying to use what Hannibal affectionately calls ‘the fatherly scold.’

“And what about Hannibal?” Abigail asks, using ‘teenage rebellion.’ “And you?” He tone softens into something more worried and scared.

“We’ll be okay,” Will says reassuringly. He touches her arm with a comforting hand. “We’re always okay.”

Abigail opens her mouth to argue, but more footsteps are heard. They all turn to face the doorway, and Annabelle in Hannibal's arms stumbles in. She sees Jack and visibly cringes, but Hannibal keeps her moving forward.

"Procel," Jack whispers as he walks forward. Hannibal lets Annabelle leave his arms to find support in Jack's, and Will is surprised by the amount of reluctance the action holds.

"Agent Crawford," Annabelle says, and she sounds scared.

"We're taking you home," Jack whispers with a firm but gentle pat on her uninjured shoulder.

Who is 'we?'

She nods and looks back at Hannibal. "Will you not catch the Ripper?"

Jack huffs. "Your safety is more important."

"And Abigail," Annabelle says quickly. "Abigail has to be safe. She has to come with us."

Everyone nods.

"She's coming with us."

Annabelle nods, trying to smile. "Good. Thank you."

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“Where the fuck did they go?” A very angry italian agent shouts at his men.

“We don’t know, sir!” A soldier shouts. “They disappeared!”

“Tch. They did not ‘disappear!’ You let them get away! Find them! Quickly!”

The men scatter and radio other soldiers as they search for Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham. There is overlapping angry Italian in the air, and the head agent grits his teeth in frustration. The amount of money Mr Verger offered for the capture of those two… it was enough to make his life *very* comfortable. It’s enough to tempt any sane man, and he knows that he has to be quick about this. Other people are looking for Lecter, and he has to be the first if he wants to be paid.

“Sir!”

Finally.

“Where?” He demands, and the simple policeman explains a route and the location of a chapel. Ironic, that the devil himself would hide in a church. “Well, don’t just stand there! Hurry the fuck up and get them!”

He climbs into his own car and drives very quickly through the tranquil streets of Florence at midnight. His engine is quiet and his mind calm as he races to the chapel, but his heart hammers in anticipation. Soon, he will deliver Hannibal the Cannibal to a very rich buyer, and he will spend his life as a richer, better man. He will not only be catching Pazzi’s Il Mostró, but also the Chesapeake Ripper.

He should go down in history as one of the greatest men, in his humble opinion. He deserves the recognition.

Men silently surround the church, all poised to flood the chapel on his command. Is this how Lecter feels when he kills? Completely in control and godlike? It is truly a heady feeling.

“ *The men are in position, sir,* ” a voice informs him in his ear.

He grins and gives the command.

His men storm the chapel, yelling and firing, and he walks through the chaos like Moses of the Christian Bible. Or perhaps even Jesus in the storm. Ah, the setting of the church could not have been more perfect.

“Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham!” He shouts, smirking. “Get on your knees and put your hands on your head. Unfortunately, there will be no court of law for you, but I’ll let you take your chances with my buyer.”

There are two women and another man - Agent Crawford, he remembers - in the chapel, and his men round them up without harming them.

“Take those three away,” he orders. “We have nothing to do with them.”

His men nod and take away the women and poor Agent Crawford.

“Now. Dr Lecter, you are a very expensive man, I must say,” he says, walking around the two men on their knees. Pathetic.

“How much is Mr Verger paying you?” Lecter asks, smirking slightly. Graham beside him doesn’t look as amused. “I am curious about the price tag that is attached to my life.”

He laughs loudly and proudly. He feels like God, standing on a skull and looking the devil in the eye. “Three million US dollars.”

Lecter’s smirk grows. “I have to say, I’m impressed.”

“About the money?” He asks.

Lecter shakes his head. “No. About the greed of man. The things people will do for simple wads of green.”

“You laugh, but you are on your knees, Dr Lecter. You are in no position to laugh,” he squats in front of Lecter and grins cruelly. “I am in control here.”

Hannibal quirks up an eyebrow. “Are you?”

Graham has the fucking audacity to roll his eyes and look *bored* .

The agent understands why, a moment later.

There are bodies falling and gunshots firing. He whips around to see one of the women - the blond, older woman - holding a gun and firing at his men. They fire back, of course, but none of them hit their target. Fucking amatuers.

“Stand down!” he shouts, pulling his own weapon and taking aim. “You are not a part of this! Go home to your husband!”

Another round of bullets fly towards her, including those from his own gun, but none hit. The woman chuckles.

“My husband is dead, good sir!” She shouts from where she takes cover behind a pillar. “There is no one to go home to.”

She moves slowly and clumsily, but she somehow still manages to not get hit by every single damn bullet his men fire at her. She makes her away through the church and the other

American agent, Crawford, enters to fire his weapon as well. So many of his own men fall, it makes him want to scream.

Fine. If he can't get his money, then he'll ensure that no one is paid. He turns to face Lecter and Graham, who are still kneeling on the ground, calm as lambs, and fires.

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The bullet hits her side, impaling her left lung and cracking a rib. It does not leave her body.

Good.

There is a ringing silence around her as she falls, but she can faintly make out the screams of men around her. Some of them have been shot, like her. Most of them were trying to save their own skin. She was trying to save Hannibal. She did save Hannibal.

More gunshots sound, and they are followed by the muffled thuds of bodies meeting the floor.

Mischa.

Hands are covering the wound, trying to stop the bleeding. It hurts, it hurts too much, but she barely has the air to voice her pain. A whine escapes her throat, similar to a dog or child.

Mischa, can you hear me?

There is not much light around her, but there is just enough for her to make out the silhouette of someone holding her. They are male, strong, stockily built.
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“Hannibal?” She whimpers, hands flailing about as they try to find purchase on bloodied clothes.

“Mischa,” a deep, rumbling voice creeps into her ear, and she sobs.

“Hannibal,” she whispers, clutching at the hands holding her.

“Be still, you’ll lose too much blood,” he whispers back, his voice soothing and kind and *so loving.*

You’re out of time, my dear. Speak, before you no longer have breath to do so.

“Look… Look how far I went,” she whispers raggedly as she blinks away tears. She can’t see the man holding her, she can’t see Hannibal. She needs to see him. “In fear of losing you.” Another stab of pain shoots through her, and she thinks she screams.

You, a child who burned in the snow.

You are Ieva’s daughter.

“Do you ever wish you knew the ending, so you could go back to the beginning and get it right?” She whispers, her voice barely understandable. Tears clog her throat and eyes. She needs to *see* him, for god’s sake, let her *see.*

The silhouette of Hannibal nods and draws her body closer to his chest.

“I don’t even know my beginning,” she chokes. “All I know is Mischa’s.” She wails aloud as the pain thunders through her.

I'm scared, Hannibal.

Hannibal cradles her and rests his cheek on the top of her head. His face is stone, not a single crack for the world to see, except for the dead eyes that haunt Will.

Her breathing becomes erratic and she clings onto Hannibal desperately. "I don't even know who I am," she cries, burying her face against Hannibal's shoulder, crying with shudders racking through her body. "I don't want to die like this. I don't want to die." *Even if you are dying for the only man you ever loved.*

She cannot see his face, and perhaps that is for the better. She imagines his boyish laughter when Lithuania was not in ruins. She imagines his clever delight when she played the piano. She imagines his loving gaze, once meant for her, and now meant for another.

"I know, I know," Hannibal whispers soothingly.

"Don't let me die like this, Hannibal," she gasps, the tears streaming down her face and staining it. "Don't let me go."

Hannibal holds her and says nothing for a few moments, contemplating how he should let her die, how he should carry her into the next world, and he finally decides when he watches her blood flow from her small body like the river Will dreams about.

"Your name Mischa," Hannibal whispers, slowly, and only for her to hear. "Not by birth, or by blood, or by title, but by circumstance." He kisses the top of her head, the thin golden hair sticking to his chapped lips. "This who you have been molded into. This is who you have become."

I am Mischa Lecter, your goddamn sister.

I have loved you for my entire life. I killed for you. I lived for you. I existed for you. I want nothing more in this life but to be embraced and loved by you.

Please.

Love me.

Her breathing steadies as the blood stains the floor.

“You are my precious sister, taken away from me a second time,” Hannibal whispers, and with that she goes limp, as if she has fallen asleep in his arms like she did when she was younger. “I love you.”

Will kneels there, his own hands coated in blood, and he looks to Hannibal, silently asking what they should do. Everything had occurred so quickly. Jack was taking Annabelle and Abigail away. Will and Hannibal were waiting. They had knelt, prepared to enter Mason’s den. Then Annabelle— no. Mischa.

Mischa.

Mischa had entered and fired away, killing so many. Will can hear the groans of pain from those still alive but dying. He had killed the head agent after he shot Mischa, and the rest were put down by Jack, who collapsed on the floor from his own shot wound. No one goes to try to save him. They let him rest.

Abigail enters, running towards Will and touching his shoulder in fear. He holds her hand and silently comforts her. She must have been told to wait by Mischa. Will is surprised she obeyed.

“Is she…” Abigail trails off and bites her lip. Will looks up to see her eyes brimming with tears.

He can only nod, and Abigail nods in return, covering her mouth as she quietly cries. The chapel is filled with her cries, no one else breathing but the three of them.

"There's a flower store, a few blocks down," Hannibal whispers, his voice rough. "Go with Abigail and get sunflowers, daffodils, daisies, and purple hyacinths. Enough for Mischa's body."

Will nods.

"I'll stay here and prepare the bodies," Hannibal says, gently gathering Mischa in his arms and making his way towards the front of the church. "It won't be my cleanest work, but it will be my finest."

Will can only nod and grab Abigail by the wrist to lead her to the flower store as Hannibal stands there, leaning on his uninjured leg with his dead sister in his arms.

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A crown of sunflowers sits atop the body, weaved into golden hair. It would glow like sunlight if the day dawned sooner, but Hannibal knows that her body will be discovered before then. Discovered and then taken away into cold morgues where the beauty of death is ripped away and reduced into a science for simple people to study. Amongst the sunflowers are small daffodils, white and innocent atop her head. On her lips and in her palms, more daffodils sat, but they are woven into her flesh. They adorn her feet - the metal and fleshy one - in a similar fashion to the way Persephone's touch beckons flowers from the earth beneath her. Her chest has been carved open to reveal hyacinths instead of lungs, as well as a sunflower for a heart, surrounded by more hyacinths. The entire chest cavity is overflowing with flowers.

Her throat is covered in daisies, all of which seem to grow from the column of her neck.

Originally, Hannibal wanted to mount her on a cross, but time was too little. So instead, she sat in the middle of the pews, her eyes open as she stared forevermore to the holy ceiling of
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the church with her hands cradling the flowers in her palm. Around her sat the bodies of the dead police, all of their heads bowed and hands cut off.

She is the only innocent in thi s *room* .

Hannibal is reluctant to leave her. The stillness of her breast and pale face is too much like death, so he holds no illusions about her life. She is dead. Gone. But his creation is not. She has been made into one final masterpiece, and Hannibal has kept his promise. He has honored her.

Will stands a few feet away from Hannibal with Abigail and Jack's cooling body. They did not honor him or dishonor him. He simply laid beside the skull on the floor with his eyes closed. Blood pooled around him and dried on the tiles. He was dead, and perhaps with Bella in the next world.

A gentle touch curls around Hannibal's bloody hand.

"Hannibal," Will whispers. There are no words meant to follow the name, it is simply an acknowledgement. *I'm sorry. I understand. I'm here.*

Hannibal turns to meet Will's gaze, and he is reminded as to why he still breathes and lives. Brilliant blue meets his own dark maroon, drowning him in affection and intimacy. There is no need for words between the - Will understands. He lost Abigail, and Hannibal lost Mischa. Now all they have is each other.

Abigail touches Hannibal's arm on the opposite side to Will - the one that still holds the knife that carved into Annabelle's body - and Hannibal looks to her in greeting.

You are not quite dead in this world. Not yet.

"We should go," she whispers, holding tightly onto Hannibal's arm. "Jack could have been lying about being alone."

“Or more of Mason’s thugs could come and find us,” Will murmurs, his voice heavy and tired. They have been moving bodies for the past hour or so, and that was after surviving a fight with Jack and the Italian police. He tugs on Hannibal’s hand, almost like a child. “Let’s go, Hannibal.”

Hannibal nods, but he never gets a chance to move.

“Hands in the air,” a loud voice declares, and it is accompanied by the click of a gun loading. A pistol, most likely.

Hannibal turns around slowly with Will and Abigail to face an American FBI agent. They don’t recognize the woman, but her accent and subtle glint of her badge are enough.

“Drop the knife and hold your hands in the air,” she yells again. “Hannibal Lecter, you are under arrest for the murder of multiple individuals, including and not limited to Beverly Katz, Jeremy Olmstead, Frankly Froideveaux, Sheldon Isley, and Anthony Dimmond. You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to speak to an attorney, and to have an attorney present during any questioning.”

Will and Hannibal exchange glances. The agent is fresh meat, young, and never before involved in something as gruesome as Hannibal’s kills. Her hand is steady and she likely has backup, but she is not a threat. Not alone.

Will waits for Hannibal’s smirk and the unfolding of some grand plan, but it never comes. More footsteps follow the unmated agent, and soon they’re surrounding Hannibal, Will and Abigail. Hannibal has made no move to escape, and every escape route is cleanly cut off. The only way they’d make it out would be if they fought their way through the wall of bodies, and even then, Abigail would be at a disadvantage. Unless they left her with the police - but she could still be caught in crossfire. Police are sloppy and Abigail’s actions are often unpredictable when she panics.

Why the fuck haven’t they moved?

“Hannibal,” Will whispers, the smallest trace of panic slipping into his voice.

They’re trapped and Will twitches at the realization. They’ll be slapping irons on their wrists and taking them away - away from each other. The FBI annoyingly have the advantage, their guns and numbers keeping Will’s feet firmly planted. If they weren’t armed with long range weapons, Hannibal and Will could destroy them. Would be destroying them.

Why didn’t they escape? Why didn’t they run when they had a chance? Why isn’t Hannibal getting ready to fight? Is he taking his chances with the American court of law? Is this to protect Will and Abigail? There is no one outside who can save them, and Abigail isn’t safe here. Mischa isn’t here to fight for them.

Hannibal, I’m scared.

Hannibal meets his eyes and smiles such a small and mournful smile. “I know,” he whispers.

He is lunging forward, blade in hand, but it’s not the FBI that bleeds.

Pain blossoms in Will’s abdomen and the only thing he can process outside of his screaming nerves is the warmth of Hannibal’s embrace and his voice.

“Forgive me for my love, for ruining you with my love,” he whispers heavily into Will’s ear, and it’s so similar to the way he’d whispers into Will’s skin as they made love after a kill. His breath is scalding against Will’s neck, and it staggers for a brief moment. “Forgive me, my beloved.”

Will is choking and whimpering as Hannibal lowers his body to the cold and unforgiving ground, the tiles too hard against Will’s quivering body.

“ *Hannibal,* ” he wheezes, but Hannibal is leaving him, moving away, taking steps back, leaving Will there to bleed out on the floor.

Will faintly hears the FBI agent scream *don’t fire!* but it doesn’t matter. He sees Hannibal extend a hand to Abigail - *not Abigail, please, God, no, not Abigail, don’t hurt her, don’t take her from me* - and barely has time to process the glint of the blade before it flashes across Abigail’s throat.

Will doesn’t watch Abigail fall to the floor. He’s seen her die too many times, in his arms, beside his body, behind his eyes, inside his nightmares. He knows how she falls, the way her body crumples like a wilted flower to the ocean of blood beneath her.

Instead, he watches Hannibal. There is blood over his hands, chest, and face. His hair is disarrayed from the fight earlier and it droops over his eyes as he kneels in front of Will, his body shielding Will’s from the sea of FBI around them.

“Farewell, my love,” Hannibal whispers to Will. His eyes are swimming with agony and Will can’t help but sob at it. Palaces of grief flings their doors wide open to Will’s fumbling hands, and he’s made to watch blond hair fall against red snow over, and over, and over again. Soon, the golden blond becomes rich chocolate, and it’s no longer snow, but yellow tiles bloodied by an echo. Maroon eyes turn blue, blue with wonder, fear, elation, love, adoration, affection, loyalty, betrayal, pain, and so much more.

You see too little, you see too much.

He doesn’t know how long he dreams about his own eyes and the intimacy they shared with Hannibal.

See?

He just keeps seeing his own eyes, his own reflection, staring straight back at him as he arches into Hannibal’s touch, as he wakes up in the morning, as he goes to sleep, as he laughs in the golden Italian sunlight, as he breathes in the river, as he kisses Abigail’s head, as he

kills Randall Tier, as he bandages his wounds, as he kisses Hannibal's bowed lips, as he screams into the mirror, as he bleeds on the kitchen floor.

Chapter End Notes

The scene of Mischa's death was the scene that started this whole fic. Originally, Mischa was an OC who was crucified and decorated by Hannibal, but then woke up hours after her 'murder.' She then spent the rest of her life searching for Hannibal, convinced she was his sister, hence why he left her alive.

This version is much more depressing!

Please comment and tell me what you think about the climax! Did I do the show justice?

(Also, the next chapters should be published relatively quickly. I've already finished writing the final chapter, and a good chunk of the penultimate chapter is already written. Thank you so much to those who have stuck around for this fic and always commenting! You guys are the reason I manage to write this!!!)

Reflections in a Blood-tainted Mirror

Chapter Summary

The Lecter heir. Will you see her? See her blond curls and the baby blue eyes that are the same shade as Alana's but filled with the same icy power of a Lecter?

Chapter Notes

says I'll update soon

updates more than two/three months later

I... I have no excuse ya'll are interested in.

But please, enjoy the 21k of agony:

(Ya'll it's been more that a year since I first started this? I'm almost crying. Wow.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Sirens and shouting.

Wheezing and gasping.

Blood and pain.

Everything outside of him seems so distant, as if perceived through water, but everything inside of him is too present. Too intimately painful. The screams of his nerves slam into his skull, demanding to be heard, but the shouts of FBI agents are a distant whisper. He hears the voices of worried doctors, frantic agents, soothing nurses, and crying women. They are not the voices he wishes to hear. He doesn't hear Abigail's voice.

Or Hannibal's.

His mind processes the light glaring on his pale skin, flickering around his mind as blurry faces lean over him to whisper soothing words. ‘You are safe.’ ‘You’re gonna be okay.’ ‘Hold on for just a bit longer, okay?’

He hates it.

They must have placed him on an operating table, because when he next wakes, there are doctors explaining stitches and asking him to drink water. His lips find the straw and sip hesitantly, but when his eyes flick down to the liquid inside the cup, he sees rich blood and the tsunamis of the ocean that drowned him.

Come back to me, Will.

He ignores the voice in his head.

Please, my dear, come back to me.

He used to think it was his own voice. Then Garret Jacob Hobbs’. Then the Ripper’s. Then Hannibal’s. Now? Now, he’s not so sure.

Dearest William, will you not return sooner?

He must react violently to the voice, if the straps over his body and on his wrists are any indicator.

When he wakes again, he wakes fully. The light is cruel against his eyes, but he can see clearly enough, and he sees Abigail, sitting daintily as she reads something on her phone. Her neck is bandaged and she looks tired, but she’s alive. The shudder of relief is immense.

“Abigail,” he whispers with a ragged voice, and her eyes snap up to his. Blue eyes so similar to his own.

“Will,” she whispers back, and she quickly moves to his side, embracing him gently. “I wasn’t sure if you were going to make it.”

The puffs of air from his lungs resemble laughter. “I could say the same about you.”

She holds him a little tighter and then pulls back enough to meet his eyes. “You must have questions.”

Flashes of blond and blood run across his mind. “A couple.”

Hannibal stabbed Will and Abigail when he realized they could not escape the sea of FBI around them. Jack was in fact not alone, although not by his own accord. Alana panicked and sent the FBI to follow Jack, and they gave everything to try to catch Hannibal. Evidently, it was still not enough. After Will and Abigail were wounded, the FBI’s priority became saving them and not catching Hannibal, giving him time to slip through their grasp.

“The way he cut us…” Abigail rubs at the white around her throat. “He wanted us to live, Will. The doctors said it was surgical.”

“He wanted to give us scars,” Will mutters. “So we don’t forget him.”

Abigail huffs. “I doubt you can forget someone like Hannibal.”

“You could try,” he whispers, looking at her. She’s young, on the crisp of adulthood, and filled with the potential to escape. She could travel to another country, change her name, make new friends, and start a new life. Meet a boy, settle down, finish college, buy a house.

Abigail could escape.

She shakes her head. “Not with… two scars.” The scar her father gave her, lying alongside the one the Devil gave her.

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He keeps mistaking blond hair for Mischa. He sees nurses with blond hair and blue eyes that don’t quite match; the faint notes of some phone speaker playing classical music during a distant therapy session which always morphs into Clair de Lune; he sees Abigail’s trembling hands and remembers Mischa’s pleading voice.

He doesn’t cry — the tears won’t come. But he lays there, wounds aching, as he remembers the way she looked at Hannibal, as if he was the world. Was that what he looked like, when he looked at Hannibal? Did he look at him with such devotion?

He dreams about her, and it’s usually the same. Her eyes stare at him, he stares back. Blood surrounds them, and Hannibal’s hands curl around her neck. He feels her fear, her love, her pain as Hannibal kills her.

When he wakes up, he can taste blood in his mouth, followed by the faint taint of flesh.

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When Will wakes one morning — he’s lost count of how many mornings he’s had to endure, it likely hasn’t been many, but it’s always been a cruel moment to wake up to cold light and sterile blankets — Abigail isn’t there waiting for him, but someone else is. He opens his eyes to see a strangely calm looking Margot Verger.

“Margot?” He whispers, and her eyes snap to him in full attention.

“Will,” she says, standing up and walking to his bedside. “You’re awake.”

He nods. “What are you doing here?”

She chuckles softly under her breath. “Do you know where Hannibal went, after the massacre in Italy?”

Will shakes his head. “Did they find him already?” His voice reveals fear and concern. *You were supposed to leave* , he remembers. He doesn’t want to see Hannibal standing behind a glass wall and make the choice to walk away from him.

She smirks, but it doesn't reach her eyes. “Don’t look so worried, Hannibal’s still out there doing as he pleases.” She sits down on the small chair closer to his bed and laces her fingers together. “Hannibal came to visit, a couple days ago.”

Will’s heart pounds. Is it from excitement? Anticipation? Dread?

“He killed Mason,” she says simply.

Relief floods through Will, a feeling he can’t bring himself to be guilty for, and it must be visible on his face.

“Me too,” she mutters.

Will nearly huffs in disbelief. Margot isn’t relieved for the same reason Will is. She is relieved that her brother— the cruel filthy sadist he was— is dead. Will could care less about Mason — sure, his death means that Abigail is safe from him, and that he won’t be chasing them. Mason would have died sooner or later, either by Hannibal’s hand or Will’s. Or Margot’s. Will isn’t relieved about Mason’s timely death, no. He’s relieved that Hannibal hasn’t been caught, trapped. That Hannibal isn’t in some cell, muzzle around his mouth and cuffs on his wrists.

“He came out of nowhere and killed Mason, drowning him in his egotistical fish tank.”

When the initial flood of relief diminishes, Will’s brows furrow. “Have you lost the Verger properties?” He asks. She should be angry, furious at Hannibal. He may have burned her cage down, but now she was unprotected from the outside world. Maybe someone would help her, but she’d lost so much so quickly. Mason would ensure her destruction even after his death — out of self-preservation and sadism.

A small grin creeps onto her face. “Hannibal said you and Abigail would need friends, now that he’s gone. And he said he was oddly fond of me.” She shakes her head incredulously. “He fucking milked Mason. We have his filthy yet precious sperm. We’re gonna have a baby, a Verger baby, so we can keep the Verger properties.”

A baby. “Who’s we?” Will asks, absolutely and unabashedly horrified of the idea of being the father to raise the Verger heir. Being a father in general. He can’t. He can’t raise a child from their birth. Abigail was made his by bloodbath, and he changed nothing about her. Simply protected her. This would be different. This would be… an entire life, molded in his hands. There’s too much blood on his hands and too much darkness in his heart and a monster lurking in his heart and—

“Don’t look so scared, Graham,” Margot gives him a friendly slap on the thigh. “Alana will be the carrier.”

Will blinks, his thoughts halting. “Alana?” The last time he saw her, she was broken on the cement with the rain hiding her tears.

Margot smiles, and it reaches her eyes this time. “You’ve been gone all this time, Mr. Graham. You’re not in on all of the *gossip* . Alana and I are together, to summarize. We’ve been together. The Verger baby will actually be the *second* child in the household.” She tilts her head upwards in what Will perceives to be pride.

“You already… have a kid?” Will whispers. He’s not surprised by Alana and Margot’s relationship — they actually go quite well together, now that he thinks about it — but about the fact that… there’s already a child in the picture. Margot lost her womb and the child Will gave her. Did they adopt? With Mason, Hannibal, and just… everything, why would they?

Margot seems to stiffen at this. “Alana is about 8 months pregnant,” she says, suddenly closing off. She bites at her lower lip and looks away. Something isn't right. Margot is so careful with her words, and even if the sudden exhilaration of being *free* from Mason and having a family of her own choice blinded her momentarily…

“Who’s the father?” There’s always a father, somewhere. Did they have a donor? Alana was injured badly by the fall. He knew — somehow — that she wasn’t dead, but she would have had to have been pregnant at the time or immediately after for the dates to match. Will and Hannibal had left the bloody kitchen almost 8 months ago, and Alana wasn’t pregnant then. Was she?

“You’re not going to like this part,” Margot mutters.

Will narrows his eyes. “Why? I’m not about to judge.” He’s the last person who could judge. Look at his own family — born in blood and death. He’s not about to lecture someone for making a life.

Margot makes a ‘I know, sweetie’ face, but it’s bitter. “It wasn’t a donor, if that’s what you’re wondering. Alana was pregnant before we got together, although she didn’t know.” She bites at her bottom lip and looks at her clasped hands. Will notices that they’re shaking. Her next words are muttered in a single breath that seems to leave her as a lament. “It’s Hannibal’s.”

At first, the words don’t register. *It’s Hannibal’s.* Why are they talking about Hannibal? What is… Hannibal’s?

It then settles into Will’s brain, but as a fact plucked from a textbook. *Alana Bloom is pregnant with Hannibal Lecter’s child.* Spoken like plain fact in the voice of an underpaid school teacher.

Then it slams into Will’s chest. *A Lecter child.*

“Will?” Margot whispers. He isn’t looking at her face. He doesn’t need to. He knows he would see concern and fear. Her body is tense, ready to protect her family from anything—from Will. “You don’t look so good.”

I am a Lecter — your goddamn sister!

“Why did she keep the baby?” Will’s voice is steady, but his heart is not. His insides are rebelling and shouting and leaping against their fleshy cage.

“She wanted protection,” Margot says slowly. “Hannibal is sentimental. She suspected he wouldn’t harm her if it meant keeping the baby safe. She ended up being right.” A breathy, halfhearted laugh escapes her. “Hannibal came to the Verger household with the full intention to slaughter all of us. But he… he saw Alana and put two and two together. Made some fancy speech about Alana raising his child, and how she was necessary to keep me safe.” She picks at her nails. “He said that our lives are a gift he gave us, and that we should not take them lightly. We exist to raise his child and to help you and Abigail. Nothing more.”

“Fucking egotistical bastard with a god complex,” Will mutters, the words distant. Perhaps he once would have said those words with affection — muttered them in Italian sunlight as he leaned across a coffee table to kiss Hannibal softly on the lips, smiling against thin lips that would reply in fucking pretentious Latin poetry — but now they just feel so… empty. Like lines from a script.

The Lecter heir. Will you see her? See her blond curls and the baby blue eyes that are the same shade as Alana’s eyes but filled with the same icy power of a Lecter?

“He killed Mason to protect you,” Margot says. “Let Alana live to save the baby. Let me live to… keep you company.” She huffs in disbelief and mutters, “ *God* .”

“He likes you,” Will says, looking at her with a tired gaze. His eyes outline the shape of her body, watching her fidget and worry. Her fear washes over him like gentle waves on the beach, and while he feels her fear thoroughly, it doesn’t touch his own heart. Her emotions are distant, seen through a glass pane that seems to be growing thicker as more moments pass. “And he likes playing God and making people owe him their lives.”

“You’re not wrong,” Margot says. “But it doesn’t really doesn't matter, does it? I’m alive, and it looks like I’m going to be staying that way for quite some time. That’s all I need.”

They speak for some more time, but about different subjects. They talk about Alana picking baby clothes and Abigail’s recovery. Bella’s funeral. Jack’s funeral. Finances of the Verger company. At some point he realizes that Hannibal isn’t coming back for him. He spared Margot and Alana for Will. He spared Abigail for Will.

“Farewell, my love.”

Those were the last words Will ever heard from Hannibal. *Farewell.*

Will feels rage, but distantly. There’s nothing in his chest, barely even his own heartbeat.

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Amongst the conversations with Abigail and Margot, there are FBI agents. They ask him about Hannibal, Hannibal, Hannibal and Abigail, Hannibal and Will, Hannibal and Florence, Hannibal and the murders, Hannibal and the cooking, Hannibal and Bedelia — who is missing — Hannibal and Hannibal.

He knows they see a tired, traumatized, old FBI professor that just escaped the Chesapeake Ripper. They all look at him with well hidden pity that is clearly seen by him. None of them know him well enough to know what he truly thought of Hannibal. They all think Will was an innocent victim. Is a victim.

He’s sure people like Freddie Lounds are painting him as a monster, one who killed people and ran away with his monstrous lover. There must be parents shaking their heads as they read the news — *Hannibal Lecter and Will Graham escape to Europe with the daughter of the Shrike, both are wanted for crimes including but not limited to cannibalism, murder, mutilation* — and hide their children’s eyes from the screen showing his face alongside Hannibal’s. A lot of people think he’s a monster.
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But, for some reason, everyone who he interacts with all think he's some sort of fragile victim. Kidnapped by Hannibal the Cannibal. Protector of Abigail Hobbs. The Chesapeake Ripper's victim.

"What you did was brave, Mr Graham."

"You've saved so many lives with your work, Mr Graham."

"Surviving the Ripper — that's really something, Mr Graham."

"Do you have any suspicions as to where Dr Lecter will go next?"

"Is it possible that Dr DuMaurier was kidnapped by Dr Lecter?"

"Why did he pick you, Mr Graham?"

"How did you manage to save Miss Hobbs, Mr Graham?"

None of them know about the black blood on his hands as he killed with a knife and Hannibal' s hands on his hips. None of them know about the bruising kisses that were filled with teeth. None of them know about Abigail's smiles as they walked along the river with Mischa. None of them know about the complete and utte *r peace* Will felt in that world.

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My dearest William.

The dreams become sweeter, after a while. He dreams of Mischa and her smiles, instead of her grimace and her death. The way she'd move through the gardens and get mud on her
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shoes as she ran around Hannibal's pristine figure. Her laughter seems to endlessly echo with Clair de Lune in the background, and Hannibal speaks to her in soft Lithuanian. He tells her stories about fairies and monsters and holds her when thunderstorms roll across the sky, drowning out the moon's melody.

Sometimes he's a ghost watching them. Sometimes he's Hannibal. Sometimes he's Mischa. Sometimes he's himself, laughing alongside them.

He dreams of Mischa's love for Hannibal. He dreams of Hannibal's grief when he lost her. He dreams of his own grief.

My dear Will, please, won't you come back?

The voice follows him, even in his dreams, but there's never a body to go with it. They whisper against his throat when he watches Mischa bleed again and again on the snow. They scream into his stomach when he watches Hannibal grieve. They kiss his cheek with a blade's edge when he watches Hannibal kill for Mischa, and sometimes he kills alongside him.

But there's never something to grasp other than the blood the voice leaves in his mind.

It taunts him with flashes of dragons and broken mirrors when his dreams drown him in blood. Mischa's laughter turns into screams when he feels himself *falling* off the abyss of Hannibal's touches, and the voice is always there at the bottom, singing a siren's song.

Will you love me, Will?

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Morphine doesn't help the nightmares — unsurprisingly. Talking to Margot and Abigail does, but not much.
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He doesn’t feel like himself, and the voice curls around him, trying to drag him from reality,

This reality, at least.

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At one point, he panics when he sees his reflection. He’s washing his shaking hands and washing his face, rubbing at the growing beard, when he looks up into the mirror and everything in him screams to *get away.*

He doesn’t make any sounds, but his heart thunders against his ribs and he can’t hear anything past his heaving breaths. His reflection stares back at him, wide-eyed and so terrified, but it’s a stranger.

He knows everything about the face. He knows the shade of blue in their eyes and the line of their jaw, but the movement of their eyes is worrying. It’s like someone else is staring straight at him and seeing everything in his mind. He’s stripped naked and laid vulnerable before his own image in the glass, and he sees everything in his reflection. The fear, the grief, and absolute weight of his thoughts.

But it’s not him staring at him in the mirror.

There are flashes of a scar on his forehead and the smile on his stomach aches, and the mirror taunts him with the echoes of cracking glass.

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He wonders if he’ll ever recognize his reflection without Hannibal standing beside him in the glass.

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He realizes at another point that he's started disassociating. Derealization and depersonalization. He's not becoming psychotic or having a relapse of the encephalitis — thank God — but he's losing his grip on things. Maybe not his grip. He's just slammed a glass between himself and the rest of the world.

A fragile glass that he steps away from, waiting for someone to crash through and kiss him with blood in their mouth.

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They want him to see a therapist. He politely tells them to fuck off.

"I think you've had enough of psychiatrists," Margot comments when he tells her about the doctor's suggestions. "But you could see Alana. Not even professionally, but just as a friend."

He shakes his head. "I don't help to… *process* what happened in Italy."

She gives him a knowing look. "Maybe you need help processing what is happening now. The world without Hannibal."

"He's still out there," Will mutters. "Out there, wreaking havoc."

"But he's not here," Margot says. "I'm personally very thankful that he's not, but you had a more complex relationship with him. He's changed you, molded you into something else. It must be strange — a life without Hannibal."

"It's quiet," Will says. There's too much silence filled with the echoes of Clair de Lune.

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“What are you going to do?” Abigail asks. “Once we’re discharged from the hospital?”

“Get Winston back,” Will mutters. “Alana and Margot took care of him and the other dogs while we were gone. Most of them have found other homes, but they kept Winston.” He sighs. “I want to see him.”

Abigail smiles. “That’d be nice. Are you going back to your house?”

Will nods. “Probably. I don’t have anywhere else to go.”

“Margot offered me a place to stay for a while, so it’s easier for me to get back on my own feet,” Abigail says. “They also said they’d pay me to babysit.”

Will cracks a small smile at that. “You’d be good with kids.”

Abigail shrugs. “Maybe. But it’d be weird — taking care of her.” Margot and Alana had long ago learned the baby’s gender. A baby girl. “I wonder how much she looks like him.”

“Or like Mischa,” Will whispers without thinking. Flashes of blond and ringing piano fills his mind.

Abigail nods stiffly. “Or like Mischa.”

Will watches her hands and the way they fidget, and he sees the old tears in her eyes.

She doesn’t need prompting to speak. “I miss her.” She wraps her arms around herself and breathes deeply. “I miss her.”

Will can only nod. His nightmares flash through his mind, and he wonders how similar Abigail's nightmares are to his own.

"It was so sudden," Abigail whispers. "One moment, we were together, all together, and *happy.* But then she was telling us about… Jack and… about Mason and how we should run. She looked so *scared* , Will. She's usually so calm and in control, but she looked so scared when she told me about Jack and the bounty. And then—" Abigail presses her lips tightly together, lifting her eyebrows and widening her eyes in an attempt to control the tears. "And then she was *dying* . Dying because *he* sent someone after her." Anger fills her, and Will can tell that it is an old anger — one that's been with her the day Garret Jacob Hobbs died. "She died for him, she fucking *died* for him, even after he tried to kill her. She took a bullet for him and died protecting *us* . She tried warning us, she protected us, and she *died* because of us."

"Do you blame him?" Will asks softly, and she jerks her head up to look at him. Her lower lip trembles and her eyes are wide.

She opens her mouth, blinking away tears, and closes it. "I want to." She clenches her hands into small fists. "She loved him so much. She did everything for him. She died because of him. Because of us."

"You're not to blame, Abigail," Will says kindly, putting a hand on her shoulder.

"She died protecting *me* , Will," she snaps, but she does not move away from Will's touch. "Everyone around me keeps dying because of me."

"It's not your fault," Will repeats. "It's not your fault that—"

"Every single girl my dad killed," Abigail cuts him off, "he killed for me. Mom was killed for me. Marissa was killed because of me. Nick Boyle? I killed him. Mischa? Died protecting me."

"Abigail—"

“Stop telling me that it’s not my fault,” Abigail whispers. “Because even if it isn’t, it still hurts. I’m alive and everyone else is dead or hurt.”

Will knows the feeling.

“I want to blame Hannibal,” Abigail continues. “But I have never been so happy as I was in Florence. I had never felt so safe. With my dad, I was always waiting for the moment he would kill me instead of whatever girl we picked. I was struggling to live. I kept waiting for the day he would grow tired of killing girls who looked like me but weren’t me. Hannibal… he protected me. He majorly fucked up my life but he protected me. I knew I was safe because Hannibal was always in control. There was no unpredictable wrath to him. He was just… there.”

“Do you miss him?”

Abigail seems to shrink. “I dream about him, you know. About Florence and about him. Some of them are good dreams. The river. The sun. The music. The nightmares are the ones where he can’t save Mischa, or when he leaves us.”

Does that make this reality a nightmare?

~~~

He doesn’t see Alana until he’s discharged from the hospital, sometime later. They tell him that it’s been a week and a half. It feels longer than that. Margot offers Will a place to stay temporarily, so he doesn't have to fix up his house all at once, but he doesn’t take it. He can’t bear to sleep somewhere Hannibal breathed and spoke so recently. He needs to go to his own home, where he is familiar with the ghosts there.

The Vergers then end up driving Will back to his place, and Will sees Alana fully swollen with life as she stands at the bottom of the hospital entrance stairs. She smiles widely when
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she sees him, her baby blue eyes squinting against the sun and her teeth barely visible as her close-mouthed smile opens slightly to breathe out his name.

“Will!”

She embraces him in her warmth, careful not to hurt her stomach. When she leans back, Will forces himself to look her in the eyes, to drown in her gaze. He consumes her surprise and hoards her relief for seeing him alive and well. Her voice rings in his ears and he replays his name on her lips over and over and over again. She speaks, asking about the smile on his stomach and any troublesome doctors, and he devotes everything to her words. Anything to not acknowledge the life growing in her belly.

You put the life in your belly and you live.

It works for as long as he expected — moments. They all walk to the car and he can’t help but notice her eyes watching his own, watching his eyes flick down to her stomach and he watches the way her hand curls protectively around it.

“Do you have a name picked out?” Will asks suddenly, cutting off whatever story Margot is telling about Alana’s new dog.

They both know he’s talking about the baby and not about the dog.

Will feels Alana’s tension in her shoulders and ankles — swollen from pregnancy — and breathes in the firm control she clutches desperately with both hands as they rest on the swell of her torso.

“Rosamund,” Alana says kindly, giving Will a small smile.

“It’s beautiful,” Will murmurs, giving a tight-lipped smile in response.

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There are screams in the air — long silenced. The furniture is covered with sheets to protect them from the dust, and the blinds shut. Light streams in through the cracks and dust floats through the air and into his lungs. The dust reflects the moonlight in his memory of when Randall Tier was made into a beast from manly flesh.

Winston barks happily by his side, roaming the house and sniffing out the rats that have no doubt made themselves at home in the empty cupboards and underneath beds. His eyes flick to the piano against the wall, with the lures that once sat upon it (a reminder of the days in prison), and he breathes deeply. Dust fills his lungs.

Isn't dust mostly dead skin cells? Legal cannibalism — breathing in dead flesh. Hannibal would find it humorous if it wasn't so unhygienic.

Will shakes his head and marches into the house, ignoring the whispers in the air.

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He cleans everything in the house with meticulous detail. Dust is banished, floors are cleaned, furniture is dragged out into the sun, toilets scrubbed, the kitchen purified, the windows flung open. He starts with the furniture and focuses on the weight of it all in his hands and the texture underneath his fingers. He breathes in the wet air and singles out every scent it carries. He watches the way the sunlight hits Winston's fur coat, the different shades of red, brown, and blond flashing against his eyes. The floors are mopped with cleaning products he bought by the bucketload at the local grocery store. The house is filled with the smell of disinfectant and his own sweat. He buys new bedsheets, some pillows, food for him and Winston, and fishing gear.

The river is still the same, the cold waters rushing around his legs as he stands in it. It's comforting. Winston barks as he splashes in the river, and Will feels himself smiling ever so slightly. He feels calm.

"You can make it all go away. Put your head back. Close your eyes. Wade into the quiet of the stream."

He huffs out a quiet laugh. He did a little more than wade, didn't he? He threw himself headfirst into the water.

He doesn't let himself cry at the memory of Hannibal's touch.

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There are quiet conversations with Alana, which he would have ignored if it weren't for Abigail's pleading looks. Alana is kind, and Will is told that he needs some of that kindness. She can help him move past the echoes of Hannibal's embrace.

Capture bonding. A passive psychological response to a new master has been an essential survival tool for a million years. Bond with your captor, you survive. You don't — you're breakfast.

Alana tells him he shouldn't feel guilty about what happened in Florence. She knows what Will gave to Hannibal. She is aware of the way Hannibal looked at Will and the way Will arched into Hannibal's touch.

"You made it impossible for him to live without you, so you could live," Alana murmurs. Her stomach swells with another child — the Verger heir — and a hand curls protectively around it.

"And in doing so, I made it impossible for me to live without him," Will shoots back.

"I can help you, Will," she says kindly, lovingly. She says his name with such kindness and mercy, but it lacks the adoration and fondness Hannibal said it with. "You can move past Hannibal. It won't be easy, but you can do it."
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“Do what? Forget about him? There is no way I can just forget him — he changed me. He *molded* me into something… something different.” Something beautiful.

“I know. But you can learn to live without his voice in your mind every waking moment.”

“Just the sleeping ones?” Will thinks back to sun-filled dreams and Hannibal’s soothing voice.

“Just the sleeping ones.”

~~~

Too often he closes his eyes and sees Hannibal leave him.

Will doesn’t watch Abigail fall to the floor. He’s seen her die too many times, in his arms, beside his body, behind his eyes, inside his nightmares. He knows how she falls, the way her body crumples like a wilted flower to the ocean of blood beneath her.

Instead, he watches Hannibal. There is blood over his hands, chest, and face. His hair is disarrayed from the fight earlier and it droops over his eyes as he kneels in front of Will, his body shielding Will’s from the sea of FBI around them.

He tries whiskey and it doesn’t work.

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Alana tells him to find things that are unrelated to Hannibal. Will goes a bit overboard and throws out every single wine bottle stored in the house. He blames the bottles of whiskey he drank.

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He fixes boat motors, occasionally a car engine. His clients are used to his quiet grumpiness. He takes Winston on long hikes. He barely speaks. He fishes. He grows a beard. Alana helps him financially, even when he refuses.

He also drinks a shit ton of whiskey when Hannibal's smile is found in the firelight.

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He dreams about Mischa's death, but he's in her position and Hannibal is the one killing him as his ribs are pried apart. Hannibal crawls into his chest to live beside his heart.

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Will doesn't know why he does it. Abigail would tell him that it was the loneliness finally getting to him, and Alana would tell him that he's desperately clutching for something normal in his life. It doesn't really matter why he did it, in the end. He still did it.

He had been jogging with Winston through the park — one teeming with other dog owners and barking balls of fur — lost in his own mind. He was thinking about Mischa, a common recurrence these days. Easier to think of her than her brother. He was remembering the sound of Clair de Lune and Abigail's laughter mixing together. Abigail took so quickly to Mischa, and vice versa. They were both so happy together, having friendly conversation that wasn't drowning in rumors of guilt and death. They were wearing fake names but were so honest.

It's the image of Mischa's surprised but happy face that was suddenly cut away when he ran into someone. Said someone was a head shorter than him and very warm. She had bangs of auburn hair framing a round face, and while physically she was such a stark contrast to the face in Will's mind moments before, the expression was almost the same.
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She had fumbled about with apologies which Will quietly brushed off, as her own small dog sniffed at Winston. Some conversation was made about the weather and their dogs, and when the silence fell between them, something new became apparent to Will.

It had been so long since he looked at someone, properly *looked.* He met only Abigail's eyes, and he knew what to find in them — grief, death, and relief for being alive. His clients weren't there for him, they were there for his skills. He didn't need to meet their eyes. These new eyes, brown and warm like melted chocolate, were so different. They were kind, innocent, untouched, playful, and… interested. Molly — her name actually stuck in Will's mind — was attracted to him. Found him handsome and wanted him.

For some reason — possibly been because he's lost his mind — he exchanged numbers with her.

You are echoing me, Will. Rewriting me in such a similar way.

And now, as he sits in front of his fireplace and clutches his phone, he wonders if he wants to continue.

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Alana tells him that it'll help him forget. So he picks up the phone, downs two fingers of whiskey, and calls.

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There are dates, normal dates, and late night walks at the park.

Molly is a bit shy, but she accepts Will with open arms. Things move slowly, carefully, at a reasonable pace for two adults, but he drowns himself in their interaction.

Molly is a firecracker of a woman lacking the trauma of everyone else he knows. They talk about dogs, about her job, about high school years, old friends, food, the occasional soap opera, books, and endless pointless things. A few dates in, he meets Walter, her son, and easily bonds with the boy. There is nothing special between them, but there is an understanding in their eyes. Will does not intend to become Walter's father, but neither does he intend to shut Walter out. Walter does not intend to become Will's son, but neither does he want to be unloved by the man dating his mother.

They go on a fishing trip together, and Walter turns out to be a natural fisherman while Molly does not.

He's laughing at Molly when she nearly falls out of the boat, and she's laughing when Walter accidentally hits him in the face with a fish, and they're all laughing at old stories while sitting on an old fishing boat so similar to Will's childhood.

Will doesn't think about Hannibal.

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Molly introduces him to her friends — all of them so horribly normal and annoyed with the common things of life — and he actually enjoys himself when they all go out for lunch at some steakhouse. Molly's closest friend — Miranda — is having an affair, her husband is gay, the waitress is struggling financially, the youngest member of the group is still paying of his student loans, his girlfriend is an aspiring singer's house struggles with stagefright, and they're all so normal.

He can't help but soak up the brilliant hews of emotion they all radiate, occasionally directing the attention onto Molly so he can watch the people without being noticed. He doesn't wear glasses — they're in his pocket if he truly needs them — and he finds that it's alright, without a layer of glass to hide behind. He meets so many of their eyes, and some of them seem a bit shocked by the sudden intensity of his gaze, but most of them don't even know they're being picked apart so carefully. They're all so unaware of how loudly their thoughts and emotions are, and for the first time in a while, he revels in it. He drowns himself in their voices and in their eyes.
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Molly has known about his ‘party trick’ for a while — he had muttered something a little too accurate during one of their dates, and Molly had bugged him until he caved — and she smirks when she catches his gaze lingering on someone for too long. She’s under the impression that he’s simply gifted and developed the skill when he studied psychology at university. She doesn’t know about his history. And why should she? She doesn’t need to know. He doesn’t need to think about it.

Will doesn’t think about Hannibal.

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She is made of soft curves of flesh, smooth to touch and warm to burrow into. She fills his lungs with the smell of faint pine, dog fur, and organic shampoo. He kisses her with as much adoration he can, worshiping the rise and fall of her breasts and pressing loving touches against her folds. She bends, pliant in his hands. She whispers soft words of affection — he tries to return them with his hands and kisses — and gently touches the ragged edges that are his body. She is kind to him, gentle, loving, and filled with so much innocence. She gives him the pleasure singing in her bones and he can feel it distantly echoing in his own body.

Her hair is gold in the firelight — he sees flashes of dead sisters and bloody teeth — and he buries his face in her neck. She is liquid in his hands, warm like blood.

Her lips are full — too full — and she hides her teeth behind them. She avoids his scars and doesn’t touch the smile on his stomach. She is filled with pity when she feels the rough skin on his body, and she tries to kiss the pain away. He drowns in her pity and tries to fill himself with the pleasure he gives her. She shudders under his hands, moans into his touch, and he buries himself in the rise and fall of her chest — the shadows flicker across her skin, making patches seem gold and the shadows under her breasts and between her thighs deeper.

He refuses to think about Hannibal.

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“Will?” Molly whispers one night, when they’re both naked as the day they were born. The air is filled with sex and sweat, and the atmosphere is content.

“Hm?” He responds, not willing to give a fully coherent response. He snuggles closer to her warm body, though, acknowledging her and giving her soft kisses.

“I saw your name in a news article, yesterday.”

She feels his body tense around her, and she presses soothing kisses to his stubble. “My curiosity led me to find something called Tattlecrime.”

When he doesn’t respond, she continues with a playful tone which barely conceals her worry and comforting voice. “Personally, I think this Freddie Lounds can shove her shitty grammar up her ass along with the rest of the bullshit she writes about.”

He forces out a chuckle and holds her tighter. He wonders how much she read. Which articles she read. He hasn’t read many himself, but he knows what they say. Some of them paint him as the tragic hero who suffered at the hands of a cannibalistic killer. Some call him a killer, flashing up photos of Randall Tier’s remains. Some of them call him too weak for letting the Chesapeake slip past his fingers. Some call him a hero.

“Do you regret letting me into your life?”

“You were a victim, Will,” she says firmly, rubbing her warm hands against his shoulder blades. “From what I understood from my brief research, you sacrificed everything to save people — including your own sanity. The girl, Abigail? I’m pretty sure you saved her from Ha—”

“Don’t,” he whispers harshly, staring at her eyes in the darkness. She knows his reluctance to look people in the eye, and the action silences her quite efficiently. He looks away once he is sure the name will not be uttered. He can’t bear to hear *his* name on her lips. To hear about him from her, it just makes him more real and less of the warm shadow lurking in Will’s chest.

“I’m sorry,” she whispers. “I didn’t think about… how his name would hurt you. You must have so much trauma.” She bites at her bottom lip. “I feel stupid for not realizing it sooner.”

“You’re not a shrink, Molly,” he reassures her, pressing a kiss to her forehead. “It’s not your job to figure out my mental health.”

“But I’m your girlfriend.” She pouts and Will melts a little at the action, the childlike innocence it portrays wrapping around Will’s battered mind. “I’m supposed to take care of you.” He can feel the insecurities building in her body — the little voice asks her why he didn’t tell her, why didn’t he trust her, why did he pick her after so many years in Hannibal’s clutches, why he is here in her arms, right now, today.

“You already are,” he says. He cracks a small smile. “Especially with your cooking.”

She huffs. “Don’t think I haven’t noticed the little pudge you’ve grown.”

“Molly,” he murmurs, and his mouth says her name with such depth that she instantly stills in his arms. He lets himself sink into her affection for him and into the fear and second guesses she has about him. “By being so absolutely… you, and not fussing over me like I’m a broken doll, and treating me like a normal boyfriend who takes your little family on fishing trips and occasionally cannot bear to speak to anyone, like someone who hasn’t had to play mind games with a cannibalistic serial killer, this is how you take care of me. This is how you *have* taken care of me.” Little tears well up in the corners of her eyes and he kisses her once, on the lips, with delicate affection. “I don’t need you to suddenly research how to take care of trauma victims and everything about my past. All I need is a happy future with you.” So he can forget.

“Kinda sounds like a proposal,” she mutters with tears in her throat.

He frowns slightly. “Sorry. I didn’t mean to—”

“Sh.” Another kiss on his lips. “It’s not a bad thing. It’s actually really sweet.”

“That a crazy person is in your bed?” It’s half a joke, half a serious question. She is filled it’s the desire to help people — to help Will — but she is scared. Scared of the things that Will has suffered and the things he has done.

“Pft.” She smacks him lightly on the arm, her face stern. “You’re not crazy. You’re just… Will. My Will.”

“You still want me, even after knowing some of the things I’ve done? The people I’ve killed?” He needs to know if it scares her, the monster lurking in his broken heart.

“You protected people,” she says firmly. He can feel the small tremors in her hands, but he knows she is sure. Those insecurities are there— but they’re not about him. they’re all about her decision to trust the man in her arms. What choice does she have, though? Will is here, Will is in her life, Will has filled that empty space in her life. He has not replaced the faceless man who fathered Walter, but he has gotten rid of the hole that man left. “And I have the utmost faith that you will protect me and Walter.”

He nods. “I will.” They embrace each other more tightly. “I always will.”

Even when you are gone.

~~~

They’re married in a month, during autumn. Winston (with Walter’s help) carries the rings down the aisle. Molly wears an overly flowery crown and veil, and somehow convinces Will to have an outdoor (but small) wedding. Molly’s overprotective family and friends somehow accept Will — probably because they don’t know about the skeletons hidden in his head — and Will manages to grow the balls to invite Alana, Margot, Rosamund, and Abigail to the wedding. Alana takes the role of Best Woman, and Molly instantly adores Margot’s unforgivingly smartass self.
~~~

Abigail is quiet during the wedding, but she tells Will privately that she's happy for him. She admits that the flashes of golden sunlight on Molly's blond family shocks Abigail every time she looks at them, and the plaid jacket of Molly's father is painful to bear.

"If I squint my eyes, it's as if we're back in Florence."

Clair de Lune rings in his mind and he grits his teeth. He thinks about Mischa and holds Abigail tightly.

~~~

"I'm leaving," Abigail says, staring firmly out the window. She turns to Will with a stern expression on her face, as if she was scolding a little dog. "I'm going to a school in the UK. I'm studying psychology."

Will tries to smile, but it comes out sad. "I hope you enjoy it there. I've heard the weather is awful."

His attempt at humor falls flat.

"I'll take the horrible weather," Abigail says softly. "I just want to go somewhere no one knows my name."

"Hannibal is a classic psychopath case that every psych course is talking about," Will reminds her. "Someone will recognize you. Freddie Lounds has got some influence, even outside Baltimore."

"It'll be better than here," Abigail argues. "At least I won't see people who ate at Hannibal's table and have to talk to policemen who lost friends to Hannibal."

Will closes his eyes and breathes deeply. "I know."
~~~

Abigail bites at her lips and looks down, her hands clasped tightly together. “Will you come with me?” Abigail asks quietly, not looking up at him. “Molly and Walter, too. It’d be nice to have family nearby.”

Will softens at this. “I thought you wanted to escape,” he murmurs.

“But I’ll miss you,” Abigail whispers, finally looking up and meeting his dead gaze. He sees her lower lip tremble. “I don’t want to leave *you.* ”

“Abigail,” Will whispers and opens his arms, and she runs into them, clutching tightly onto him.

“You’re the only one who can help me with the nightmares,” she whispers into his shoulder. “The only one who knows what he was like.”

“Yeah,” Will murmurs into her hair.

Hannibal was a monster.

He was a monster when he held Will’s hand to guide the knife into someone’s chest. He was a monster when he fucked Will while covered in blood. He was a monster when he killed Anthony. When he killed Mason. When he threatened Alana. When he buried a stranger in flowers and whispered the only name she ever knew.

He was loving.

He was kind, doting. He peppered Abigail with affectionate kisses and drowned Will in adoration. He was warm in the mornings, fiery at noons, and molten in the evenings. His hands were steady when they guided Abigail’s on the piano, steady when they worshipped the canvas of Will’s body.

He wasn't a monster when he loved them. He was the Devil — banished from heaven because his love was too strong.

It's the first time Will consciously thinks of Hannibal in a long time. He shoves the thoughts — the flashes of crooked teeth; glinting hair in the Italian sunlight; soft laughter in the evenings; heavy breathing in his ear; the sounds of skin slapping skin; whispers of adoration against his skin; maroon eyes staring comfortably into his own; Clair de Lune ringing in the background — into a small corner in his mind, locked away for his dreams to reopen.

~~~

Abigail flies out a few weeks later, and Will drives her to the airport. Their goodbyes are filled with unshed tears. He knows he can't escape, the way Abigail can, so Will stays. He can't abandon this place. Something small in the back of his mind whispers that he has to stay, because Hannibal could come back. He shoves the thought away. He is staying for Molly. He is staying for Molly. For Molly and the normalcy she offers.

Molly is in the background, waiting for him as he says his goodbyes. She holds him tightly when he walks back to her, his face blank.

"She'll be calling us every other day, you know that, Will," she says comfortingly. "She's not really gone."

"I know," Will murmurs. "I know." She'll live forever inside his mind.

~~~

It's been a year since he came back to Baltimore. He doesn't remember the exact date the FBI stormed Florence, but Alana mentions that Rosamund has just turned one year old. There is something guarded in her expression — she is weary of his reaction — and Will feels something deep tug at his heart. He hasn't seen Rosamund. He's been too terrified of what he

might see. Alana knows that Rosamund is a dangerous topic for Will. Sometimes he smiles and offers kind words, sometimes he shuts himself in and tries not to remember Mischa.

This time, he breathes deeply and decides that it's been long enough.

"Can I meet her?"

Alana blinks and her mouth opens slightly in shock. She recovers quickly — not quickly enough for Will's careful eyes — and blinks a few times. "That would be lovely. When would you want to come over?"

Her eyes are kind as she offers Will access to her home. He shakes his head. "I was thinking we could all go out to lunch, or something. Maybe a picnic, if you think a restaurant isn't the best atmosphere for her."

Alana does not immediately speak, and Will knows what she is weighing in her mind. Will thinks like a cop, like a criminal, and picks a public space for a reason. Public spaces means that people will be watching him — would he hurt them? Would the eyes of the public restrain him from inflicting harm on the child of his captor?

He watches her hand move unthinkingly to rest on her stomach.

Will knows why he picks somewhere in the public — he can't bear to be surrounded by traces of the Lecter family. The Verger household would be drowning in Hannibal's touch and presence. Will won't go there. He won't go anywhere too close to him.

~~~

Alana shows Will a picture first, a few days before the planned picnic. It's professionally taken, and Margot and Alana are also in the picture. There is a light blue backdrop, Margot sits on a carved wooden chair with Rosamund in her arms. Alana stands slightly behind and beside Margot, hands on Margot's shoulders — looking like some sort of divine protector.
~~~

The slight swell of her stomach is hidden by the chair. Margot and Alana have cold but beautiful expressions on their faces, professional and untouchable. Rosamund is a perfect representation of a bewildered baby who wants to be anywhere but there.

Rosamund inherited her mother's eyes. Will is grateful.

~~~

When he meets Rosamund, he feels horrendously foolish. She is small, made of baby fat and needy screams, and utterly… helpless. Margot and Alana fuss over her and give her what she wants and demands — be it food, milk, toys, their attention, anything — and she searches blindly for their presence. Her eyes are large, young, and filled with pure innocent curiosity of the world around her. Everything is too bright, too light, too large, too beautiful for her small mind to properly perceive, and it delights her. She claps her hands in an attempt to get her mothers' attention. She squeals and babbles to simply hear her own voice.

Will feels foolish for feeling utterly terrified of her.

Polite conversation is maintained, mostly about Molly, Walter, work, marriage, the simple things. Rosamund is there but never the center of attention, as if Alana and Margot were still trying to hide her from Will's eyes.

"Can I hold her?" Will asks when the silence lulls for too long and Rosamund's peals of laughter ring too much in his ears.

There is fear in Alana and Margot's eyes, but he can see them think the same thing: what would Will do to their baby? There is nothing he could do other than simply hold her and be overwhelmed. Rosamund would not be harmed by Will's hand.

Margot is the first to nod, and she scoots closer to Will on the picnic cloth to properly hand Rosamund over to him. Will sees the determination to not be fearful in Margot's eyes. He feels Alana's shoulders tense besides him.
~~~

Rosamund is warm, squeamish, and loud. She looks at Will with such scrutiny and makes soft noises under her breath. She is wary of his embrace but does not protest when he sits her down on his lap.

The world seems to fade away around him. There is no more Alana, no Margot, no noisy murmur of the crowds around them. Simply him and Rosamund in his lap. Will closes his eyes and breathes in the smell of grass and baby powder.

“Do you think she enjoys the view?”

Will’s mouth parts in a silent sob and he tries not to shudder.

“She is already so perceptive of the world around her,” Hannibal murmurs, touching a finger to her cheek. “She reminds me of you.”

“I’m much quieter,” Will whispers, his eyes still closed. He feels the weight of Hannibal’s body shuffle beside him on the blanket, and the warmth he radiates.

“In public, perhaps,” Hannibal muses. “But when you are comfortable, you are certainly not the quietest.”

“She’s more like you,” Will whispers. “Infatuated with everything this world has to offer. Curious to a fault.”

“I’m sure you were once like that, before the world dealt you a cruel hand,” Hannibal says. He sips at the coffee in his thermos, watching the park. His gaze is heavier than Rosamund’s, but it holds the same intensity. Everything is consumed by his eyes.

“What do you think, Rosamund?” Hannibal asks, turning to smile at Will and the six-year-old in his lap. “Are you more like me?”

She laughs in Will's arms, and he instinctively holds her tighter. "Maybe," she says, her voice playful like Mischa's.

"Maybe," Hannibal repeats before taking another sip.

"She's like Mischa," Will whispers.

Hannibal pauses, his thermos halfway to his mouth. He blinks a few times before speaking. "How so?"

"Innocent. Curious. Beautiful." Will presses a light kiss to the top of Rosamund's head. He presses his tightly closed, scared of what he may see when he opens them.

"You're not wrong," Hannibal admits as he sets down the thermos. "But you are also like Mischa in ways Rosamund never will be."

"How so?"

"You are scarred by love," Hannibal says, and he meets Will's gaze behind closed eyes. "Scarred by your adoration for monstrous things."

Hannibal disappears in that moment, and Will opens his eyes to find Rosamund still a baby in his arms and Alana looking at him with concern. He tries to smile for her and he holds Rosamund slightly tighter.

~~~

Will refuses to see Rosamund after the picnic, Hannibal's voice still in his ears. He shuts out Molly for a day or so, and he eventually shoves the dark whispers back into the far corners of his mind when Molly welcomes him back into their bed. He tries to drown himself in her.
~~~

It doesn’t work.

~~~

Walter is staying over at a friend’s house, and Molly drags Will off to a romantic dinner. They find a familiar restaurant which serves homey food, and they laugh throughout the night as they talk about life. The food is warm and familiar, and Molly’s presence is comforting. They talk about anything, joking about anything, and Will gives her soft smiles.

Occasionally his eyes will darken as something in the room reminds him of older days, and Molly clasps his hands tightly in sympathy. She knows of the voices in his head, but he can’t bear to tell her the truth about them. She is under the impression that Will is scared of the darkness in his mind. He doesn’t know how to tell her that he aches for it.

That night ends with hot kisses and even hotter touches. He picks her apart with steady hands, and she shudders at his every touch. He knows her inside out, the deepest parts of her and the surface of her skin. He has always been attentive during sex, and Molly was never an exception. He consumes everything she offers, and he drowns more in her pleasure rather than his own.

When they both collapse, tired and satisfied, onto the bed with heavy breaths, a familiar ache settles in his chest.

“You’re living her life,” Hannibal whispers.

Will grits his teeth and breathes deeply.

“You drown yourself in everything she is, hoping that if you exist only in her voice, her touch, her mind, you could somehow escape yourself. When was the last time someone gave you your own pleasure?”
~~~

“You know when,” Will whispers with unmoving lips.

Hannibal hums. “You hide yourself in her. How long do you think this tactic will last?”

“I don’t know,” Will admits.

“It has to come to an end. When will it end?”

“I don’t know,” Will repeats.

“No,” Hannibal says. “You don’t.”

~~~

“Do you miss her?”

Will pauses in the kitchen, the knife steady in his hand. He’s attempting some basic Cajun dish, knowing that Molly will only subject him to her teasing. The vegetables are in different piles around the cutting board, and the pot of soup boils next to him. Molly is picking Walter up from school, and he’s alone in the house. Alone with his thoughts.

“Of course I do,” Will murmurs.

Hannibal purses his lips slightly before donning his usual controlled expression. Nothing to see in his expression, nothing to see in his eyes. Everything to feel in his touch. “You miss her, but it’s different.”

Will huffs and continues cutting. “You’re gonna have to elaborate.”
~~~

“It’s similar to why you miss Abigail.”

“Don’t talk about her,” Will spits.

Hannibal continues without barely a pause. “You are grieving, not for them, but for yourself.”

Will feels himself shaking. “Don’t talk to me about Abigail when you’re the one who killed her—”

“You're grieving, Will,” Hannibal says firmly. “Not for the life you have taken, but for the life that was taken from you.” A heavy hand places itself on Will’s shoulder. “A daughter was taken from you. The chance to nurture life.”

“And Mischa?” Will clutches the knife tighter. “What am I grieving, if it’s not her?”

“Yourself.”

Will sets the knife down with a clatter and spins around, staring into the empty kitchen.

The phone suddenly rings shrilly, and it shocks Will. He takes a small moment to catch his breath — when did his heartbeat rise this much? — and walks over to his cell. He picks it up. “Hello?”

“Hi Will!” Abigail says from the other end of the call, and Will is momentarily frozen. *Abigail is alive.* “Sorry to call you so suddenly, but I’ve got a question about psych. It’s about how abused kids seek out abusive figures and…”

Will closes his eyes and focuses on the sound of her voice. *Abigail is alive* , he tells himself. *Abigail is alive. Mischa is dead. Hannibal is gon* e.

~~~

Molly dozes in his arms. The fire crackles. The dogs are asleep at their feet, the light flickering on their rich shades of fur.

“When was the last time you looked in the mirror?”

Will closes his eyes and breathes deeply. Hannibal’s voice has become all too familiar. “This morning.”

“Did you recognize yourself?”

“I didn’t see myself,” Will admits softly.

Hannibal nods. “Of course. You are not yourself. Not right now. Not with Walter as your son and Molly as your wife.”

He grits his teeth. “You have no right—”

“You dream of Mischa,” Hannibal continues. “Not necessarily about her death, but you dream of her. The way she interacted with Abigail. With me.”

Will is silent.

“Did you recognize yourself in her?” Hannibal asks. “Did you see your own gaze in her eyes? Her love reflected your own, and you are grieving her because you are grieving the loss of your love, or perhaps your ability to express your love.”
~~~

“I… I don’t understand.” Will licks at his lips and looks down at Molly’s sleeping face. She looks so peaceful. The elegant figure sitting across from him is filled with chaos.

“She was terrified of the darkness, yet she ran towards it. You are terrified of the darkness within yourself, and you run from it. You run from the monsters in your head towards the monsters around you. You ran to me. She ran to her own nightmares in search of peace. She was looking for the only person who could ever fully love her, because they would be the only person who could understand her.”

“She was looking for the only person who would accept her.” Will sighs and Molly groans softly in her sleep.

“Love is acceptance, and understanding. Love is dedication.” Hannibal looks at him with dark eyes flickering in the firelight. “You are scared of it. You are angry. Angry at how our love has only given you pain, when it is supposed to free you.”

“I wasn’t the one who left,” Will reminds Hannibal.

“You were the one who threw us off that cliff,” Hannibal whispers. “You wanted to destroy us.”

“We were destroying each other.”

“Because you refused to look at me,” Hannibal says. “Must I denounce myself as a monster while you still refuse to see the one growing inside you? You refused to look at my adoration, at my love, at my heart because you knew that if you did, you would find what you believe you do not deserve — acceptance. You refused to accept me and yourself, so you tried to kill us.”

“Stop,” Will whispers. “Stop.”

“Mischa ran to me the way you wanted to. Why do you refuse to embrace me? Why must I be the one who embraces you, and suffer no embrace in return?”

Will grits his teeth.

“Occasionally I drop a teacup to the floor just to see it shatter; I'm disappointed when it doesn't pick itself up and come back together. But this time, I gave you the teacup, and you were the one who dropped it. You shattered it, and it is your fault that it will not gather itself together.”

~~~

“I keep seeing him,” Will mumbles. He runs a heavy hand over his face. “I was getting better. I was living a good life. I got married. I got a job. I have a son. I have a stable life with nothing in it to remind me of Hannibal.”

“But you keep seeing him,” Alana murmurs.

Will nods. “I hear… his voice when I cook. I hear him when I can’t sleep at night. I feel his touch after dates with Molly.” He sighs and hangs his head, his arms resting on his thighs. “I can’t stop thinking about him. It’s not even memories of him, anymore. It’s just… him. His entire presence. He’s in my head.”

“You miss him” Alana whispers, almost too softly for Will to hear.

He huffs. “It’s sick. I… I’m not losing time anymore, but I keep seeing flashes of a life that isn’t this one. I keep forgetting that Abigail is alive. I see Mischa in the mirror. I see cracks in the mirror that aren’t actually there and I hear a *dragon* for some goddamn reason.”

“This other life,” Alana says in a calm voice. Always so calm, so careful. “Is it one you live with Hannibal?”
~~~

“Yes,” Will says. He licks at his lips. “A life where I didn’t run away with Hannibal. But a life where I went looking for him anyways.”

“If you knew where Hannibal was, do you think it would help?” Alana asks. “You keep imaging places and scenarios which never existed, so if you knew the reality of his life right now, could you escape these thoughts?”

“Maybe.” He laughs softly. “If I could see him in a cage made of glass, maybe I could get him out of my head.”

“You have to remind yourself that Hannibal is gone, Will,” she whispers. “He wouldn’t come back.”

It shouldn’t hurt as much as it does. *He wouldn’t come b* a *ck* . Would he? Would he come back? If he did, what would he come back for? For Will? Would he come back, covered in the blood of kills Will hasn’t seen, and kiss Will on the mouth while whispering adoring words?

“No,” Will says. “He wouldn’t come back. He wouldn’t risk getting caught.” He said his farewell in Italy. He made his choice to leave Will.

“You have to forgive yourself, for missing Hannibal,” Alana whispers. “Hannibal changed you in ways I doubt you can ever truly escape. But you have to remember that Hannibal was —”

“A monster?” Will suggests, cutting her off. “A creature wearing a person suit?” He laughs bitterly. “The Devil himself?”

“Hannibal was cruel,” Alana says. “A sadist. He enjoyed your suffering.”

“He enjoyed playing God,” Will murmurs, leaning back in his chair and sighing deeply.

“You have to remind yourself that Hannibal is bad for you.”

Will’s mouth twitches. “Like a drug. Or alcohol.” Alana doesn’t seem amused.

“Hannibal… people like Hannibal don’t love.” Alana says it with a bitter tone, almost regretful. Will thinks back to the days when she frequented Hannibal’s bed. Did she believe that Hannibal loved her? Did he ever tell her that he loved her?

“That brings the question: what is love?” Will asks, meeting her tired gaze. “Is it… a feeling?”

“Hannibal was completely selfish.”

“Love is selfish,” Will murmurs. “Love is selfless, love is selfish. Love is patient, love is jealous. Love is hopeful, love is hopeless. Love is kind, love is blind.” He smiles without any joy in his eyes. “Who are we to say that someone else cannot love?”

“Do you believe Hannibal loved you?”

“Mischa loved Hannibal,” Will says. “She loved him with everything she was. Her entire existence was simply… love. She was selfish in her actions — she was naive, like a child. She was scared, selfish, rash, and she loved Hannibal.”

“She was manipulated and abused into—”

“She still loved him.”

“What she felt wasn’t love.” Alana’s expression is grim and leaves no room for argument. “It was an obsession.”

“Love can be obsessive. Love consumes you. Do you not love Margot? Do you not covet her with only selfish intentions? Sure, you are selfless as you support her and carry the child of her sadistic brother, but is it really selfless? It’s all selfish. You crave her adoration and her desire.”

“Even if it is love, it’s not healthy,” Alana says. “Mischa’s love for Hannibal killed her in the end.”

Will nods. “She was never given the opportunity to love him completely.”

Alana narrows her eyes. “How would she have loved him?”

“She would have bared her soul to him, and embrace his soul in return,” Will thinks back to her ribs cracked open. “But she never got the chance.”

“She died after she told him everything,” Alana says.

Will nods. “She died loving him. Embracing him for who he really was.”

“Would he have embraced her, in return?”

Will blinks slowly. “I don’t know. Mischa… she’s the only person who could scare him like this.”

“She wasn’t truly Mischa, though,” Alana reminds Will. “Procel was lying to Hannibal.”

Will shakes his head. “She wasn’t lying. Mischa may have not been born of Lecter blood, but she was bathed in it. She was his sister. She was real.”

“Would her bloodline stop Hannibal from embracing her?”

“No,” Will says. He remembers daffodils and a chest cavity without lungs. “It didn’t.”

~~~

She sits there, hands in her lap with the palms facing the ceiling. White daffodils are growing from her palms, the blood staining only the stems and not the petals. A soft smile is on her lips, lips which are made of daffodils, bright yellow. On her head is a crown of sunflowers, woven tightly into her hair. The lines of age around her eyes are hidden by the yellow petals, and the gentle moonlight is kind against her skin.

Clair de Lune rings in the background, and her body sways to the rhythm.

Her chest is empty of flesh and filled with hyacinths to make bright pink lungs, a shade similar to fake blood in films. Her beating heart is a single sunflower, bright and in full bloom.

She turns her head to smile at Will, who is sitting a few feet away from her. “Hello, Will.”

“Hey,” Will murmurs.

“Where’s Hannibal?”

Will shakes his head, keeping his eyes on her golden lips. “I don’t know.”
~~~

She frowns. “Is he not coming back for us?”

“I don’t know,” Will admits.

“Oh,” she says softly. “Okay.”

They sit there together in silence, listening to the music as the flowers in her throat bloom.

~~~

It’s late at night, and the rest of the world is asleep. Will sits in the bathroom, the weak light casting yellow shadows on his skin, staring at the mirror. He’s leaning on the sink with surprisingly steady hands, and he can distantly hear Molly snore. It’s endearing.

Mischa is on the other side of the mirror, ribs cracked open and flowers on her throat, lips, and on her head.

“Why can’t you forget me?” Mischa asks. “I was no one. You didn’t like me, at first. You were glad that I was kind to Abigail, but there was kinship between you and I. I loved Hannibal. I loved Mischa. I never loved you.”

“I don’t know,” Will admits.

Mischa nods. The flowers bend as she moves the muscles in her neck and the sunflowers atop her head are tightly woven into her hair. “You dream of me, and often it is of my death, and of my childhood. You view me as a child. Why?”

“Your love for Hannibal is childish,” Will says. He focuses on her eyes, filled with so much life as her corpse stares back at him. “It’s something you never let go of, throughout your entire life.”
~~~

“I am defined by my love for Hannibal,” Mischa concludes. The sunflower between her flowery lungs beats, and Will can hear it echoing his own heartbeat. “I have no other traits that define me. My entire being revolves around Hannibal.”

“You are love,” Will murmurs. “You are love for Hannibal, and loved by Hannibal.”

Mischa smiles and spreads her arms, palms filled with summer. “I loved Abigail because she is an echo of someone Hannibal loved.”

“I thought you were an echo.”

Mischa shakes her head and some of the flowers dangle from her flesh, threatening to fall. “Not of Abigail. Or even the real Mischa.”

Will stares in the mirror and Mischa stares back. She smiles sadly and Will stares at her lips, filled with daffodils.

“I am an echo of you.”

~~~

“Why can’t I forget him?” Will asks. “I forgot, for a while. I was doing alright. But then it just… it keeps coming back.”

Alana sits across from him, her stomach no longer round, and her face older with nights of sleep lost to two children crying in the dark. “You didn’t move on.”

“I thought I did.”
~~~

“You didn’t move on, you simply repressed the memories. You didn’t deal with the trauma, you simply tried to ignore it.”

“I’m not going to be able to *deal* with it,” Will mutters.

“We tried to help,” Alana says. “But you talked about things without processing it.”

“I don’t need help processing what happened in Florence,” Will hisses.

“No. You don’t. You need help processing the world around you. You’ve been dead, Will. There’s no life in you, you’re absent.”

“I’m surviving.”

“And your mind is telling you to stop your methods of survival. You need to say goodbye to Mischa, to Hannibal, to Florence. You have to stop holding on and stop pretending to forget.”

“I can’t,” Will whispers.

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“Will.”

A shuffle of bedsheets, a soft, warm hand.

“Will.”
~~~

“G’ way…”

“William.” A soft kiss. “Will, wake up.”

~~~

Stop running from me.

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Will finds himself at a bar, sipping golden whiskey and watching the people around him. He’s watching the mundane thoughts of the bartender and engaging in polite conversation. The atmosphere is thick with honey-colored lights and the shouts of people playing pool, and he breathes in the smell of drunken men and women, trying to get laid, trying to forget, trying to move on, trying to live life to the fullest. The thoughts around him lap at him like gentle waves on a beach — *flashes of glinting rivers and bright smiles* — and he relaxes into it.

“Hi there.”

Will freezes momentarily before turning his head to look at the newcomer who sits to his right.

“Hey,” Will murmurs in response.

The man is strange, too open, too friendly, and dangerous. Teeth too white and a smile too sharp.

“I haven’t seen you around here before. What’s your name?” The man has a lively voice, the pitch rising and falling to create an alluring tone. His stance is open, inviting, and utterly

false.

“Han,” Will answers, feeling playful. “You?”

The man grins and Will internally feels everything click into place. A killer. “Harold.”

Will hums. “So, you come here often?”

Harold laughs and bites at his bottom lip, looking into his glass and then back at Will, who maintains steady eye contact. “Yeah, I’m a regular. I’m old friends with the owner, so occasionally I get a discount or two.”

Will watches him with careful eyes and lets all of the killers he’s ever caught into his mind. Garret Jacob Hobbs rests in his stance, the Puppeteer pulls his mouth into a smile, and the Chesapeake Ripper — the creature hidden behind layers of careful suits and manners and power — sits behind his eyes. Will feels Hannibal in his bones and he dares Harold to approach him.

“Is that so?” Will replies. His eyes flick quickly across Harold’s figure — taking in size, weight, muscle mass, hidden weaponry — and notes the jeans tight around the hips but shirt loose across the shoulders. His smile is gentle and welcoming but his eyes are dangerous, and Will sees the outline of a knife in the pocket of the jacket. Immature.

“Oh yeah,” Harold says, smirking with a hint of sexual tension into his glass. He bites at his lips, licks them, and rests the cup against his mouth. Will watches the soft tissue — not chapped like his own lips — and wonders if this man has ever tasted human flesh. “Can I buy you a drink?”

“And use up your occasional discount?” Will asks, leaning back in an attempt to appear less threatening and more inviting. He watches Harold with brilliant blue eyes and raises his eyebrows softly, making his expression playful and innocent.

Harold laughs softly. “I don’t mind. Not for someone like you.”

“Someone like me, huh?” Will muses, sipping at the remains of whiskey. He too bites at his lips and Harold’s eyes flick down to watch them. Definitely an oral fixation. Hannibal would laugh — in his quiet, polite, and god complex way.

Harold leans closer and tilts his head forward. His eyes are a dark shade and they reflect the bar’s tacky neon lights. “I think you’re very aware of the way I’m looking at you — especially when you’re looking at me the same way.”

Will suppresses a laugh. Harold — if that’s even his real name — is referencing the thinly veiled lust in his eyes, but Will knows what lies behind the soft, puppy eyes that must have lured in so many. Harold looks at Will and sees a good fuck and a good kill. Will looks at Harold and sees a good fuck and good kill.

Will thinks back to reassuring touches — meant to calm, to adore, to worship — during the days before he knew the truth about Hannibal, the days when he couldn’t bring himself to see Hannibal as anything more than something akin to a friend. Harold looks at Will with curiosity and murderous desire.

Hannibal looked at Will with the need to consume, to possess, and to be consumed in return.

Glasses of whiskey are passed between warm hands which linger too long, and eyes focus on lips red from being bitten and teased. They enter each other’s breathing space, crowding the other against the hard wooden surface of the bar. Harold whispers cunning words — not careful enough for Will’s sharp eyes and the carefully molded monster in his throat — and Will replies with vague words that could come out of Hannibal’s mouth at a clever dinner party filled with red meat. Soon, it’s no longer eyes that touch skin but hands as well, and a heavy whisper lands on Will’s ear.

“Wanna get out of here?”

“For what?” Will whispers, tilting his head back and looking at Harold with hooded eyes.

Harold grins with too much teeth — it's not endearing like Hannibal's toothy grins, filled with crooked teeth that spoke of poverty in childhood. "C'mon, Han. I think you know what."

"I wanna hear you say it," Will whispers. "Wanna hear you admit it."

"Admit what, sweetheart?" *Sweetheart, darling, dearest William.* "That I wanna fuck you?"

"Maybe I wanna do the fucking," Will suggests, and he smirks when Harold's gaze doesn't falter. So, he likes the ones that fight back.

"Maybe I don't mind that," Harold whispers back, lips inches away from Will's chapped lips — chapped from morning kisses with Molly, heavy kisses in the evenings, lack of water in his system, too many bites.

"Your place or mine?" Will asks. Not that it matters — Harold will die in the car.

"Yours, if you don't mind," he whispers.

Will wonders if Harold kills them during the journey, or in the safety of their own homes.

"Wanna share your car?" Will asks, setting his glass down and standing up. "I can come back for mine in the morning."

"Sure." Harold shrugs on his coat and stands next to Will, handing him the keys. "I trust you're still sober enough to drive. Because I'm certainly not."

Will smirks slightly. He's sober enough to kill. Sober enough to fuck. Sober enough to drive. "I'll survive."

Harold laughs, the sound too sharp. “I’m sure.”

Will hides the look of bloody anticipation in his eyes.

The car ride is mostly silent, but Harold’s hand is on his thigh and it crawls up. Heavy hands and warm touches press into Will’s skin through the material of his jeans, and Will thinks back to Hannibal sizing up people, judging the meat on their bones. He doubts Harold’s a cannibal, but it’d be funny if he was. A certain poetry to it all.

The hand eventually finds its way to Will’s crotch and palms at it. Will sucks in a tight breath — focus on the road ahead, the kill ahead — and feels himself hardening. He sees flashes of thick red — black in the moonlight — and remembers soft sheets and quiet moans and gentle whispers and adoring touches pressed into his skin like a psalm for the gods.

Will’s breath catches and he realizes how much he misses Hannibal.

“You doing alright, Han?” Harold asks, his hand still on Will’s dick.

Will nods, sees a road which leads into the woods, and pulls over. Harold makes a questioning sound — he must be thinking how easy this kill must be if his victim is driving them to somewhere unseen, somewhere unsafe, somewhere away from prying eyes — and Will ignores him, driving deeper into the little dirt road as he breathes deeply, in and out, in and out.

He stops the car, shoves the keys into the cup holder, and kisses Harold.

There’s nothing gentle about the kiss. The angle is awkward, the steering wheel is in the way, Harold’s seat belt is still on, and Will is filled with too much anticipation, but it works. It sets something alight in Will’s blood and he drags himself out of the seat to sit in Harold’s lap, kissing with too much teeth.

“Shoulda known you like it rough,” Harold moans against Will’s mouth. He licks at his teeth and Will really has to laugh on the inside.

“You complaining?” Will asks, grinding down against Harold.

“Fuck no, it’s hot as fuck.” Harold laughs, and Will grins.

“Good.”

Will grabs the knife in Harold’s pocket and pulls it out with careful hands, noting how Harold’s hands do not falter as they palm at his ass. He rolls his eyes behind closed lids and kisses Harold as he puts the knife on the driver’s seat. He won’t kill Harold yet.

There are too many layers for a proper fuck, so it ends up being a rough handjob with old lube Will somehow has in the car. The engine is off so the air fogs with steamy breathing and hot sighs, and Will feels high on it. He’s high on Harold — who is eager for a fuck and for the coming kill — and he forgot how intense it all was. The sex. The death. The steady thrum of his heart as he waits for the blood.

“Fuck, you kiss like you’re eating me,” Harold mutters, and Will can’t hold back the short laugh that escapes him.

“You have no idea,” Will quips. “No idea.”

“You a killer, like me?” Harold whispers, and Will sighs in content as the hand around his dick quickens. “I thought you were someone playful, but you got something else in you.”

“Still planning on killing me?” Will wonders aloud.

“Still considering it,” Harold admits.

Will scoffs and moans as he nears the climax. “What’s to say I won’t kill you?”

“Dunno,” Harold whispers. “Maybe it’s the hand around your dick, maybe it’s because you’re lonely.”

Will’s hips stutter and Harold grins.

“You see a lot, dontcha, Han? See so much in me that you forget what I can see in you. Maybe I can’t see so much in your eyes or the way you carry yourself. Not as much as you can see in me. But I can tell that you haven’t killed in years, but you used to be damn good at it. You used to kill with a partner, but now you’re all alone. Now you’ve been hiding in the good people of society, pretending to be something you’re not. No one’s touched you like this for years, haven’t they, Han?”

Will snarls against Harold’s mouth. “You think you can replace him?”

Harold laughs and bites off a choked moan when Will’s hand tightens around Harold’s dick. “Probably not,” he gasps. “But God, I want to. I want more of you. I wanna know you. Wanna kill with you. I wanna know what you look like covered in blood.”

Will’s hand falters.

“I want this to be intimate,” Hannibal growls, wrapping a hand around Will’s member. “I want you to give me everything you are and love me for everything I am.”

Will’s hips stutter against Hannibal’s touch. “Everything I am includes the anger and love I feel for you.”

Hannibal kisses him softly. “I know.”

“I’m still angry. I’m still pissed at the thought of Alana in your bed. At the thought of being betrayed by you. I’ve… I’ve forgiven you, don’t get me wrong,” Will whispers, almost angrily as they disentangle for a moment to pull down their boxers. “But you are not off the hook,” he hisses as he pounces on Hannibal again.

“I know, Will,” Hannibal murmurs, throwing away Will’s underwear. “I know.”

“You are mine, Hannibal,” Will hisses as the pleasure begins to mount. “Your designs are mine. Your life is mine.”

“As you are mine,” Hannibal whispers, his voice honey and oozing through Will. “We are the same, now.”

Harold comes, and Will bites Harold’s throat, hard enough to break skin and he feels blood spurt into his mouth. The pleasure rips through Will and he comes as well, gasping into the blood streaming from Harold’s neck. Harold spasms below Will, and blood spurts across Will’s clothes, Will’s face, the windows, the seats. Will numbly realizes that Harold is bleeding out.

“You’re beautiful.” It’s Hannibal’s voice, ripped from memories in Florence when they left a man to rot in an alleyway with only his lungs left in his chest.

Will starts to cry.

He feels so close, so fucking close, with a man bleeding out underneath his hands and with the blood in his mouth, but he’s never been further away. He feels so fucking lost — some lost sheep, lost from the shepherd — and he hates it. He can feel the power singing in his bones, the thrill of the kill beating in his chest, but it’s all so fucking pointless. He killed a man. He fucked a man and kills him with his own teeth. He’s sitting there, in a dead man’s lap, covered in blood, and so fucking lost.

No pleasure. No beauty. No purpose. No righteousness. This was a fucking tantrum and it will fix jack shit.

Will feels like screaming.

“Do you miss it?”

He groans and shoves himself off Harold’s body.

“Do you miss me?”

He staggers out of the car and walks into the woods, leaning against a cold tree.

“Do you miss the way we would embrace each other, the blood still hot on our skin?”

He vomits.

“I think you do. It’s not the death you miss — if you truly missed that, you would have killed someone long ago. No, it’s the intimacy of it all. That’s why you had sex with this man, and why you ripped his throat out.”

There’s tears and streams of curses stuck in Will’s throat, the blood sticking to his lips.

“You miss the intimacy of the kill, the adoration.”

“Fuck off,” Will shouts into the wind.

“You miss how loved you were, after each kill. You bore to me the deepest parts of your soul, and I loved you for it. I loved you for the death, for the blood, for the violent desire in your bones.”

“Fuck off!”

“You miss being loved by someone who knows the deepest crevices of your body and the darkest corners of your mind.”

“You aren’t even here, you left *me* , you’re just in my fucking head you piece of *shit!* ”

“Love is acceptance. You miss being embraced by someone who accepts you.”

“I said shut up!”

“You regret never truly embracing me in return.”

Will screams and vomits the rest of his stomach. The fluid feels like water — *ice running down his throat, forcing its way into his lungs* — and he drops onto his knees. *Brutal waters slam against his wounds and Hannibal clutches to him tightly. The rushing sounds of thunder and the ocean currents scream into his ears and he feels the faint heartbeat in his chest. Hannibal reaches for him, clutches at his soaked clothes, and he tries to breathe in fire.*

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“Will?” It’s Molly, with her soft touches and warm embrace. “Are you alright?”

It’s been a week since the death of Harold. Will hasn’t been the same. He’s been distant, cold, and in pain. He wakes from nightmares more often, and Molly’s embrace does little to comfort him.
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Will gives her a smile he knows will not convince her. “I’m alright.”

She sighs. “Will.” She says his name so differently from Hannibal. She sounds like a mother scolding a troublesome child. Hannibal sounds like a mortal kneeling before an altar of the gods. “I won’t pry. Whatever it is that’s bothering you, it’s something only you can fix. But please… please tell me what I can do to help. We’re married, partners.” She tries to smile. “We’re in this together, okay?”

Will nods and wraps his arms around her. “I’m sorry. I’ve been.. absent.”

“I doubt it’s your fault,” Molly whispers into his shoulder.

Will thinks back to the blood he scrubbed from underneath his nails and the weight of Harold’s body in his arms. “I’m working through some things.”

“Can Alana help?” Molly asks. She adores Margot and Alana — as well as the children — and knows that the Vergers are the few people he will talk to willingly.

Will shrugs. “I dunno. I hope she can.” He doesn’t intend to tell her a word of any of this. He won’t mention the fact that he slept with a stranger behind Molly’s back, he won’t mention that he killed that same stranger, and he will certainly not mention that he wants to do it all over again.

“You were whispering Hannibal’s name, last night,” Molly says, and Will tenses in her arms. “You were crying.”

Will closes his eyes and holds her a little tighter. He’s sorry that Molly is the one he’s hurting. She is innocent and strong and beautiful and Will finds himself hurting her a little more every day.

“I thought you were getting better,” she whispers.

“So did I,” Will admits. “But I doubt I’ll ever be free of him. Not completely.”

“Was he hurting you, in your dream?” Molly asks.

No , Will wants to say. But what can he say? The truth? That he was dreaming of Hannibal’s embrace, of Hannibal’s return, of Hannibal’s departure? “Yeah,” Will murmurs. “Something like that.”

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Will visits another bar.

The man is large, strong, and not a killer. He’s slightly older, graying streaks in his hair. He looks at Will like he’s a toy he can’t wait to break.

“You alone, tonight?” The man asks, hands resting on Will’s hips.

“Not if I go home with you,” Will whispers.

They go to the man’s apartment — Tony, Will recalls — and the mattress is stiff against his back as they kiss. Tony wrestles Will down, hot hands demanding Will to submit to him, and Will resists. He bucks up and snarls and bites harshly at the skin exposed beneath his touches. Tony is rough and stronger than Will, but it doesn’t worry Will. This man isn’t a killer or an abuser. Will won’t die tonight.

When they get to the fucking — Will reluctantly bottoms —, the air turns thicker and Will hears Hannibal’s voice in his head. Tony is whispering senseless words with no poetry or elegance, and Will drags his face down to meet Will’s gaze.
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“Wrap your hands around my throat and call me darling,” Will whispers, and Tony is shocked for a moment. The submission, the desperation in Will’s eyes must be easy to see, and it throws Tony off guard. Vulnerability is something Will didn’t think he would be showing tonight. but he needs it. He needs to hear Hannibal’s thick voice in his ear and whispers loving words.

“Okay,” Tony whispers, voice rough. Heavy hands rest on Will’s throat and Will arches into the touch. “Darling.”

Will comes to sweet murmurs of *darling, darling, darling* .

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He comes close to killing a few times, but he hasn’t. He’s fucked six men in as many weeks, but only Harold is dead. The rest are burned into Will’s mind as he sits in front of the mirror and looks at Mischa. Each one was different, some dominated Will, some submitted, some were serious, some were playful, some were younger, some were older. He felt their entire mind in each encounter, and he left as soon as possible after each fuck.

“What do you hope to achieve, doing all of this?” Mischa asks. “Sleeping with all of the men in the world won’t fix your problems. Killing them won’t, either.”

“I feel lost,” Will murmurs.

“And this is how you’re trying to find your way?” Mischa asks, incredulous. “You know this won’t fix anything. if anything, this only makes your problems much more blatantly clear.”

“And what is my problem?” Will snaps.

“Like you don’t know,” Mischa mutters. “You miss Hannibal. You feel lost without him.”
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“I’m trying to find my way.”

“Amongst faceless men and steamy nights?” Mischa asks, raising a brow which disappears into the sunflower crown on her head. “This won’t fix anything.”

Will sighs. “I know.” He hangs his head and groans softly. “I know.”

“What do you miss?” Mischa asks softly, her flowery palms pressing against Will’s shoulder. “About Hannibal?”

“I miss the darkness,” Will whispers, a sad smile on his lips. “I miss the way Hannibal would embrace me in that darkness, and how he made love to me, embracing this… darkness inside of me. I miss being understood.” He stands and walks out of the bathroom and sits down on the empty bed. Molly is staying out later with friends, so Will is alone with Mischa. Walter sleeps down the hall.

“You could find him,” she whispers. “Reach out, run away to Europe, recruit Chiyoh, and find him. Find him and have that life again.”

“I have a life here,” Will whispers, burying his face in his hands. “I’m married and I have a son.”

“He’s not your son, though,” she reminds him. *Not in the way Abigail was your daughter. Not in the way Rosamund is his daughter.* “And you’ve already broken your wedding vows.”

Will looks up and smiles heartbreakingly at Mischa. “Then what’s holding me back?”

You went looking for him in the other world. If you look for him in this one, will everything else happen like the other world? Will dragons rip at your cheek and will lovers tumble off cliffs?

She sighs and sits down next to him, her weight dipping the mattress. “Fear. You don’t want to find him only to lose him again.”

“I can’t live without him. I can’t live with him.” Will chuckles bitterly and it comes out almost like a sob. “I just want us to…”

“To love and to be free to love.”

Will nods. “We ruined each other with our love.”

Mischa puts a loving hand on Will’s shoulder, guiding him into her arms. The flowers that make up her lungs and heart are soft against Will’s cheek. “Sometimes it’s okay to become a ruin, for love.” She’s warm, flooding him with love.

Will says nothing, just breathing in her soft perfume and the smell of her body, not smelling like a cadaver, but full of life. Full of love.

He refuses to acknowledge that he is embracing empty air and smelling ghosts.

“And sometimes,” she says softly, like a mother soothing her children. “It’s okay to die for a love like this.”

Come back to me, Will.

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Will is sitting in the kitchen, holding a cup of coffee and staring at the kitchen tiles when it hits him.
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“We could disappear now. Tonight. Feed your dogs, leave a note for Alana, and never see her or Jack again. Almost polite.”

“Shit,” Will mutters. “Fucking shit.”

He stares at Molly playing with Walter and the dogs outside. They’re laughing and snow flies in the air. They are peaceful, free from the monsters in Will’s head. From the monster he is. From the monster he loves.

He knows he has to leave. He can’t taint them. He can’t ruin them. The only thing left to do is ruin himself.

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Last time, he was scared. He was scared of his desire to run away with Hannibal. This time, he’s calm. He knows that he will always run towards Hannibal. No matter the world, the timeline, the amount of blood on his hands, he’ll always run to Hannibal.

“You are incomplete without him,” Mischa murmurs.

Will nods. “I am defined by my ability to understand him.”

“And your refusal to embrace him.”

Will huffs. “I think I’m embracing him, this time.”

“Is it too late, though?”
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Will blinks. “What do you mean?”

“What if… what if he’s gone? What if you can’t find him?”

Will shakes his head. “I’ll find him.” He breathes deeply. “I have to find him.”

Mischa nods. “I wish you good luck.”

Will narrows his eyes. “You sound like you’re saying goodbye.”

She smiles sadly, the flesh stretching around the flowers in her lips. Blood trickles down her lips to her chin. “That’s because I am. I can’t come with you.”

“Why not?”

She shrugs. “Right now, I am your reflection. when you find Hannibal again, I won’t be in the mirror anymore. You won’t see me — you’ll see yourself.”

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He manages to convince Molly and Walter to take a trip without him. He talks about work and some appointments he knows he won’t attend. She can see that he’s lying, but she doesn’t press. They embrace on the doorstep, Walter waiting in the car. He breathes in her scent and silently says farewell.

“I love you,” she whispers.

Will nods. “I know.”
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She kisses him lightly, and he kisses her back. “Stay safe, okay?”

He smiles. “Don’t worry about me. I’ll see you in a week.”

She gets into the car and he can see the tears in her eyes through the car window.

He waves goodbye and walks back into the house. After a deep breath — he notices his hands are shaking — he steps into the house and begins to pack.

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There’s a flight to Lithuania booked for the next morning, and his bags are waiting in the living room. He’s spent the past few days making final touches for his goodbye — finances for Molly, a lackluster goodbye note, his resignation for work — and sitting by the mirror with Mischa. They speak about how Will will find Hannibal, where to begin, and he sees flashes of a ruined castle in his mind. Mischa tells him stories of her childhood and he makes note of the locations she describes.

He’s sitting in the upstairs bedroom, speaking in low tones with Mischa when he hears scraping and humming from the kitchen, and Will narrows his eyes as he stares at the doorway. He hadn’t heard a door opening, or any footsteps. He didn’t hear anything. Molly shouldn’t be home. She left days ago, with Walter and the dogs, and he should be alone in the house. Alone with his thoughts.

He looks back to Mischa in confusion, but she only gives him a sad smile.

“Go,” she whispers, and suddenly she’s gone.

Will presses his fingertips to the cold glass of the mirror and murmurs a soft goodbye.
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Breathing deeply, he rises and begins walking towards the stairs. “Hello?” He calls out, walking down the stairs at a slow and steady pace.

There is no answer and the sounds barely stutter.

Will arrives at the first floor slowly, wishing he had a weapon in hand (his gun is in the suitcase by the front door), and he rounds the corner to peer into the kitchen. He thinks through several self defense techniques and he feels the soft hum of adrenaline in his bones, but there, standing in his kitchen, is no enemy, no one to fight. It’s… Hannibal, humming to himself as he fries something on the stove.

“Hannibal?” Will whispers, freezing, and quivering where he stands, the adrenaline still running through him and his heart races because of it.

Hannibal turns around calmly and gives Will a smile, the frying pan in hand. “I hope you don’t mind a simple protein scramble for breakfast.”

Will doesn’t respond, he doesn’t know how, how is he supposed to respond? Hannibal is here, Hannibal is alive, Hannibal is standing there in his kitchen and making a damn protein scramble.

“I don’t find you that interesting,” he had whispered.

A pause, almost contemplative, and then a smirk, that damn smirk that once made his inside twists with lust and then made them twist in betrayal.

“You will.”

Hannibal is here.

He looks tired, as he stands there. There are shadows under his eyes, his skin is pale, and there are cuts on his cheek, a day old, maybe. But he's there, he's here, standing in Will's kitchen and smiling fondly.

Fond eyes and broken smiles.

Will can't do anything but stumble forward. He can't speak. He can't breathe. He can't think. He can do *nothing* but stumble towards Hannibal, the man who represents all of the sins Will never had the courage to commit. The sins Will *had* the courage to commit. The adrenaline and addiction of the kill and the fire burning in his mind and body and soul.

And then he's suddenly embracing Hannibal tightly, clutching to him like a child. He shakes as he holds Hannibal, breathing in his scent like a drug and digging his hands into the leather jacket Hannibal has on. His touch is warm, so warm, and Will is gasping against Hannibal's shoulder. Is he crying? Probably. Does he give a damn? No. He couldn't care less about anything right now, because Hannibal is here.

His hands find Will's curls, securing Will's head against his shoulder, and the touch nearly undoes Will. He's shaking against him, and he can't help but whine softly at how right this feels. How perfect it feels to be in Hannibal's arms again. How well his body slots against Hannibal's. How warm everything is.

"Will," Hannibal whispers, pulling back enough to meet Will's gaze for just a moment, and Will finds himself lost in those dark eyes as they carve into his soul. Those eyes close gently, and then Hannibal's lips are brushing against his.

Fuck.

This is the touch that breaks Will. This gentle, intimate brush of lips against lips has Will gasping against Hannibal's open mouth and snapping. Everything has turned electric, burning through their skin, and Will is scrambling to grasp at Hannibal, stumbling as he pushes Hannibal against the counter and kissing him roughly, angrily, desperately. Hannibal almost whimpers against his mouth at the sudden aggressiveness and Will shudders as memories of their first kill together floods his mind. The blood, the moonlight, the intense and yet loving sex. All of it fills his mind's eye and he kisses Hannibal the way he once imagined killing him.

You're mine, he thinks as Hannibal kisses him furiously . *Only mine. Only I can know you like this.*

The dark sheets, embracing him as Hannibal kisses him. The moonlight streaming into the bedroom. The heat exploding under his skin. The way Hannibal would clutch at him and mutter in Lithuanian. The slight pain in Hannibal's eyes when he was breached. The ethereal pleasure that filled Hannibal after he found that spot in him. The sweat soaking through the sheets and sticking to each other.

The intense feeling of belonging and power, flowing in his blood.

He's never forgotten. He'd wake up in the middle of the night with memories of nights in Florence, and quietly try to shove them away into the depths of his mind. But he's never forgotten. The images became blurry over time, but that feeling — the fire in his body — was always there when he woke up remembering Hannibal's loving voice. The feeling of being alive.

"Hannibal," Will gasps, grinding hotly against the man. "Bedroom. *Now."* Funny, how these are the first words he utters to him after so long. Everything is so vivid beneath his fingertips, the colors exploding behind his eyes. The heat in his groin is pressed tightly against Hannibal, and the heat of Hannibal's steady hands against his skull is so comforting.

Will holds back a laugh. He almost forgot how easy it is to breathe, when kissing Hannibal.

Hannibal does not refuse his demands, and they stumble towards the bedroom, their hands fumbling at each other's clothes as they kiss. The stairs are trickier to get up, and they wouldn't be if the pair agreed to let go of each other for a few moments, but neither of them allow a single breath of air to slip in between them. The touches are scalding against their skin, and he can't get enough. He can't pull away from him for long enough, and each touch only seems to increase the need to be close. After an eternity or a moment, they arrive at the master bedroom, and finally Will hesitates.

An image of Molly floats into his mind. Her soft hair, a rough shade of blonde, and her soft lips and soft smiles. Her quirky little habits and her need to understand the pain Will refuses

to talk about. Her need to know exactly what Hannibal did to him, exactly how he broke him.

"Do you ache for him?"

Yes.

This is the room he shares with Molly. The room he made love to her in. He had kissed her and loved her and pushed gently into her and shaken with pleasure with her in this room. This is the room that he created a whole other life, free from Hannibal's darkness.

Hannibal kisses him softly, asking if he really wants to do this.

But this is the room where he had kissed her and imagined Hannibal, where he had loved her and imagined Hannibal, where he had pushed gently into her and imagined Hannibal, where he had shaken with pleasure only because he thought of Hannibal.

He glances at the full length mirror by the door, and it feels strange, not seeing Micsha in it. The glass is simply glass, and there is nothing in the room except Will and Hannibal.

The room is already contaminated. If anything, this is the room in the house where Hannibal's presence is most dominant. This is where Will dreamt of him and whispered his name and convinced Molly it was nightmares.

It only became a nightmare when he woke up and found Molly and not Hannibal beside him.

Will kisses him harder and drags him to the bed. It's not like he ever planned to sleep in it ever again. He was leaving, leaving Molly and this facade of normalcy he's created. He was leaving to run to Hannibal again. Let Hannibal taint his life even more than he already has.

They fall onto the bed, still breathing into each other's mouths, and Hannibal moves onto his knees and drags Will with him, placing him on his lap and still kissing him deeply.

"Will," Hannibal whispers in between the frantic touches. "My dear Will."

How long has Will dreamt of that voice in his ear? How long has he gone through life, barely surviving, and waking to the ghost of Hannibal's voice, whispering his name?

Will kisses him harshly and threads his hands roughly through Hannibal's hair. It's shorter now, and his bangs are almost gone. *Flashes of a glass prison and never touching hands.* He misses the longer hair, when he could properly grab it and use it to maneuver Hannibal around according to his will. But he can survive. For the first time in years, he can finally breathe.

Will shoves his hands under Hannibal's shirt and touches him with unforgiving hands, but then Hannibal is pulling back and shrinking away from his touches.

"Hannibal?" Will asks, shocked by the sadness he sees in Hannibal's eyes. Fear racks through his body and the words *don't you dare leave me. Not again.*

"May I make a request, Will?" Hannibal murmurs, touching Will's wrist gingerly. Affection. They rest their foreheads against each other, sharing breaths. Their eyes are open, consuming the sight of each other. Intense blue eyes which consume everything, dark brown which judges all. Sun spots on older skin, rough from days in the wind. Grey hairs dotting the hairline. Lips chapped from kisses shared with another lover. Scars on a cheek, pale and long healed. New lines around the eyes.

Will nods, shaking as he tightly holds Hannibal's waist. What if this is all a dream? What if Hannibal isn't here? What if none of this is real?

Come back to me, Will.

“I don’t want to have angry sex,” Hannibal states bluntly. “I don’t want to unleash all of our rage upon each other. I don’t want to reveal my anger and frustration like this.”

Will watches him intently, frustrated that Hannibal won’t meet his eyes. Those eyes are consuming every facet of Will’s face except his eyes, and Will hates it. He wants to see him. He wants to be seen. He wants to drown in Hannibal’s gaze. *Look at me.*

“I want this to be… tender. Sweet,” he whispers quietly, barely glancing up to meet Will’s eyes before his gaze is suddenly a tidal wave crashing over Will.

Will nearly breaks at the gaze Hannibal gives him. Will could kill anyone he wanted, fuck anyone he wanted, dive into the head of any killer, but none of it would comfort him. He’s been lonely, all alone inside his head with only ghosts to accompany him, and he’s been alone for years. He’s been missing this — this gaze which sees him, completely.

Will leans in slowly and kisses him gently on the corner of his lips, his eyelids fluttering. “You wanna to make love?”

Hannibal chuckles underneath his touch. Will realizes for a moment that it’s probably because his accent came out. Then he realizes that he’s smiling as well, overwhelmed. His memories may have been sharp and painful to dream of, but the voices in his head cannot compare to the rich tone of Hannibal’s voice in his ear, accompanied by warm air. “Yes. I want this to be sickly sweet and tender and loving and comforting. I’m done with the pain I’ve dealt with in these four years. I just want… peace.”

Will scoffs and kisses him again. He thought he had peace with Molly. A normal life. Maybe it was normal, he thinks as Hannibal unbuttons his shirt. But it wasn’t peace. Peace is contentment. He wasn’t content with Molly. He wasn’t even alive. But now, as he kisses Hannibal, he finds himself not needing a thousand distractions. Hannibal is enough. Hannibal, soft and pliable under his hands, is enough. Hannibal physically *here,* is enough.

“Then let’s make love,” Will whispers. “After so many years, let’s do it again, like that last night in Florence.” Maybe Hannibal isn’t here. It doesn’t matter. Because even if this is a dream, he needs this. He needs to touch and to feel and to remember what it was like to be embraced by his monster.

Hannibal wraps his arms protectively around Will. “Except this time I’m not leaving you, *mylimasis* . I am never leaving you again, never harming you again.” He kisses at Will’s pulse under his jaw. “I can’t stand being alone after tasting companionship like this.”

Will nods and slips off the first layer of clothing. “I know.” He scratches at Hannibal’s scalp as he kisses him. “I know.”

Sex in Florence was often rushed, a result of the high a kill gave them. It was messy, quick, and filled with teeth. Will remembers how he tore through Hannibal’s expensive shirts more than once, just to touch and to feel skin against his hands. Sex in the mornings was gentle and soft, lazy. Clothes were a distant concept, and neither of them were really awake yet.

Will imagined his first embrace with Hannibal after so many years to be rough, all consuming. He expected to be broken by touches and bleed from sharp kisses. He’s not sure why he didn’t anticipate this.

Hannibal touches Will the way one would touch a statue of holiness. Hands are rough from years of killing but gentle as they map out the old and new scars on Will’s skin. His lips are soft and warm as they trace the bones of Will’s collarbone, shoulder, ribs, and jaw. His breath is hot against Will’s skin, and it accompanies soft whispers in languages Will can barely recognize, much less understand.

“I missed you,” Will admits against Hannibal’s throat. “I missed you so much.”

Hannibal pauses for a brief moment, and then wraps Will into a tight embrace, tucking his head underneath Hannibal’s chin. “I thought of you every moment we were apart, my dear. I saw you in crowds, in films, in my dreams. It was hell, living without you.”

“I thought I could escape you,” Will murmurs. He sits, pliant, on Hannibal’s lap, his hands resting on Hannibal’s chest. “I thought that I could forget.”

“Did you want to escape?” Hannibal asks, running his hands up and down Will’s back, his fingertips pressing against each knob of his spine.

“I thought I did,” Will says. He closes his eyes and presses his face more firmly against Hannibal’s chest. “I tried to forget — drown myself in the whiskey. But really, I just wanted you back. I didn’t want to live in a world where you weren’t beside me.”

“We are conjoined, Will,” Hannibal reminds him. “I am sorry I left you.”

Will clenches his teeth and lifts his head up, meeting Hannibal’s gaze. “I was alright, for a year or so. I got married. Found a stable job. I didn’t think about you and I drowned myself in the people around me.”

“You removed yourself from anything that could remind you of us.”

Will huffs. “I drowned myself in everything that wasn’t you. I thought it would work.”

“When did you realize that it didn’t?”

“When I met Rosamund,” Will says as he touches Hannibal’s jaw with steady hands. “I was holding her as I sat in the park, Alana and Margot sitting next to us. I closed my eyes, and then you were there, sitting next to me. Rosamund was in my arms, laughing, and we were talking.” He traces his thumb along the curve of Hannibal’s bottom lip. “It felt so real.”

“You hallucinated me?” Hannibal asks, his brow furrowing. Will notices the not-so-subtle hand which touches his forehead to check his temperature.

“Not exactly,” Will says, gently grabbing the hand against his head and bringing it down onto their laps. Their fingers intertwine and Will almost laughs at how cheesy they must look. “It was… something more vivid than a memory, but not a hallucination. I knew it wasn’t real. I knew it was all in my head. I was still in control of myself.”

“And how did holding Rosamund make you feel?” Hannibal asks.

Will laughs at that, the sound too loud for the intimacy of the moment, but Hannibal smiles in response with too much teeth to be considered traditionally attractive. “Am I back in therapy?” Will asks, shifting in Hannibal’s lap.

“You were never in therapy with me, Will,” Hannibal says, trying to hide his smirk but failing to do so. “We were merely having conversations.”

“Conversations about teacups and time and the rules of disorder,” Will murmurs.

“Did Rosamund remind you of Abigail?” Hannibal asks.

Will shakes his head. “She reminded me of Mischa.”

“And so, she reminded you of yourself,” Hannibal concludes, brushing a strand of hair from Will’s eyes.

Will nods. “You made me realize — dream you, anyways — why I kept seeing Mischa, and not just only you.”

“Mischa represents loss,” Hannibal murmurs. “Loss of each other, of our lives, of Abigail, Mischa, and whatever sense of normalcy you were clinging to.”

“Mischa represents love,” Will says. “My love for you.”

Hannibal doesn’t speak, and his expression becomes blank. Will sees him trying to find the perfect response to Will’s words, shifting between different person suits.

“Don’t hide from me,” Will whispers, holding Hannibal’s face with his hands. “You don’t have to hide, anymore.”

Hannibal doesn’t speak, and instead kisses Will.

“I’m here, Hannibal,” Will whispers. “I love you. I’m here. I see you.”

“Beautiful boy,” Hannibal murmurs against Will’s open mouth. “My beautiful William.”

“I see you,” Will repeats as he is lowered against the bed. “I see you.”

Crooked teeth sink into Will’s neck, and he drags Hannibal closer, closer, always closer. Hannibal moves differently now, his weight more carefully balanced between his legs and hands. He avoids resting weight on his right knee, and Will feels more joints creaking underneath his hands. The kisses are heavier, filled with grief.

“I need you,” Will murmurs as Hannibal touches him through his boxers. “Please.”

“Of course,” Hannibal whispers before kissing him again.

“I slept with other men,” Will admits. “When you were gone.”

Hannibal bites at the skin covering Will’s ribs and he arches into the touch.

“I was angry at you, at myself. I wanted to forget.”

Hannibal noses his way down to Will's crotch and Will moans softly at the feeling of Hannibal finally touching him. He has flashes of Harold's blood covering his clothes and cannibalistic comments. Takes a lot of trust to let a cannibal blow you.

"At first I didn't plan on it. I was just drinking my sorrows away," Will murmurs, curling his hands into Hannibal's thin hair and pulling him against Will's crotch. "But then someone approached me, a man around my age, and it was obvious what he wanted—oh fuck." Will grinds his head against the mattress as Hannibal's mouth wraps around his cock, his teeth grazing lightly against the skin.

"He wanted fuck me," Will manages to gasp out. "And kill me— *oh god* don't stop."

Hannibal lifts off completely to ask, "Did you kill him?"

Will nods and Hannibal bites at Will's thigh.

"Answer me," Hannibal whispers harshly against his skin.

"Yes, fuck, yes I killed him," Will all but shouts, and Hannibal — seemingly content — swallows Will back down. "Shit. I planned to cut his throat, he was carrying a knife so it'd be easy, but then we were all over each other — *oh yes,* just like that, god I forgot how good you are with your mouth — and I bit his throat. I fucking tore it out."

A wet finger — when did Hannibal find lube? — traces Will's hole and he groans softly as it enters him.

"Did you enjoy it?" Hannibal asks — sounding fucking broken with a hoarse throat but still maintaining enough dignity to sound in control — as he presses into Will. "Did you miss the taste of blood?"

"I threw up everywhere, once I realized what I did," Will says, laughing and then groaning loudly as Hannibal sucks him again. " *Fuck* . I bit him as I came, and then I was shoving

myself away from the body as fast as I could. I was screaming into the wind and vomiting everywhere, but it wasn't because I killed him."

Another finger enters Will and he grips Hannibal's hair more tightly.

"I was angry, because I knew that I had been lying to myself for these past four years," Will whispers as he bucks into Hannibal's mouth. "I missed you so much." Will realizes there's tears running down his face. "It wasn't the killing, the sex, or the power I missed. It was you." He grits his teeth and roughly pulls Hannibal off his dick as a third finger enters him. "And I need you to fuck me right now, Hannibal."

"You missed being understood," Hannibal murmurs as he climbs up Will's body to fit against him so perfectly. He kisses at Will's temple as he pushes himself into Will. "Sharing a kill is a very personal experience, one which amplifies a bond already existing."

Will breathes heavily as he grips Hannibal's shoulders with iron hands. "Did you share a kill, when you were gone?"

Hannibal mouths at Will's shoulder and shudders as he seats himself fully inside Will. "No. I knew I would only be disappointed."

"No one would see the kill like you did," Will says. "They wouldn't see you like I see you."

"What do you see, Will?" Hannibal whispers into his ear, hot air brushing against sweaty skin. "What do you see when I kill, when I maim, when I mold art out of unworthy flesh?"

"Fuck I missed your voice," Will gasps. Hannibal snaps his hips forward and Will keens.

"Answer me, Will," Hannibal snarls. "Do not deny me your thoughts."

“You’re like a god, when you kill,” Will snaps as he groans into Hannibal’s shoulder. the sound of slapping flesh fills the air and Will notes that Hannibal is still pretty damn physically fit. “You’re always in control, no matter what, but to be in control over life and death — it’s magnificent.” A hot hand wraps itself around Will’s dick and he bites his lip and tries not to come too soon. He needs this to last. “Your killings are a fucking statement — statement that you can do whatever you damn well please, and you’ll do it perfectly.”

“What is my statement…” Hannibal muses, his words a heavy pant. “When I kill with you?”

“Adoration,” Will groans. “Joy— oh fucking *fuck* —”

“I almost forgot how limited your vocabulary becomes when we have sex,” Hannibal mutters fondly as he arches back and grabs Will’s thighs. “It portrays how much control you lose, how vulnerable you become.”

“I bare my soul to you,” Will mutters as he lays against the mattress and grips the sheets. “After you try ripping it from my mind, and you show me yours.”

“Quid pro quo,” Hannibal says, dropping his head as his hips stutter.

“Quid pro fucking quo,” Will says. “Don’t you dare stop,” he mutters, grinding his hips against Hannibal’s and gasping for breath. “Faster.”

Hannibal leans over Will’s body and kisses him with an open mouth, and Will breathes heavily against Hannibal. “I’m sorry I left you.”

Will grabs Hannibal’s head and kisses him with teeth and tongue. “I forgive you.” Hannibal touches Will a final time and Will shouts as he comes.

“I will never leave you again,” Hannibal whispers as he collapses on top of Will’s body. “I’d never forgive myself.”

“I’d never forgive you, old man,” Will mutters, pleasantly floating in the high of endorphins.

Hannibal bites Will’s ear softly in retaliation, and Will laughs. He laughs softly, at first, but then it builds and builds, echoing around the room and around the house, and he feels Hannibal chuckling against him. It feels so blissful to touch and to hold Hannibal. He can feel his heart beating in his chest and the blood in his body, but it’s different now. He feels so *grounded* with Hannibal here, in his arms.

“Fuck. I missed you. I missed you so fucking much,” Will says, resting a hand against Hannibal’s back.

“I spent most of my time imaging you in my mind palace,” Hannibal says.

“Did you imagine fucking me?” Will asks, purely to poke at Hannibal’s old libido.

Hannibal scoffs and moves to the side, gathering Will in his arms so they face each other. “At times, yes. But I imagined showing you the world I was living in.”

“Where did you go, actually?” Will asks. “I doubt you returned to France or Italy.”

Hannibal nods. “I went to Greece, actually. And England, for a short period of time.”

“To see the statues of Ancient Greece and Rome?” Will asks, raising a brow.

“Yes,” Hannibal says, sighing and pressing his hand a little tighter against Will’s back. “I imagined walking along the white beaches with you at my side, making comments about the people in the streets or staring longingly at stray dogs.”

“Of course mind me would want to adopt every stray dog we saw,” Will mutters.

“It was a very accurate reconstruction of you, on my part,” Hannibal says.

Will laughs. “I’m sure.”

“You sometimes watched me, when I killed, but it was rare.”

“Why?”

Hannibal pauses, thinking for a moment. “I didn’t want to be reminded of your absence. My kills were… impulsive. Almost foolish. Unnecessary.”

“You were angry.”

“Irritable,” Hannibal corrects. “I lost control. I didn’t want to see my construction of you standing in the shadows, judging me for my foolish actions.” He smiles slightly. “You scolded me at one point for a sloppy kill.”

“Did you feel probably chastised?” Will asks.

Hannibal smiles. “Completely so.”

Will scoffs. “You would have lectured me for hours if you saw my kill. It was messy and desperate.”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal whispers. “Or perhaps, I would have watched in awe as you gave into the darker parts of you, in an attempt to find comfort in my absence.”

“Narcissist,” Will mutters.

Hannibal smiles and kisses Will softly. “I was angry at my own reconstructions of you, however.”

“Why?”

“I knew they couldn’t compare to you.” Hannibal brushes the hair from Will’s forehead and eyes. “I could memorize every detail of your body, recreate it on paper, on canvas as, out of marble, but I could never hope to recreate your mind.”

“Too chaotic for you?”

“You are the one thing in my life I struggle to predict,” Hannibal says. “And even if I manage to predict your actions, I fail to predict my own response. You reach parts of me I buried deep enough to almost forget completely.”

“Parts that Mischa also reached,” Will says softly.

Hannibal sighs. “Yes.”

“Did you grieve her?” Will asks.

“Of course,” Hannibal whispers. “I grieved her the first time she was killed, and I grieved her the second time.”

“Would it have been easier, if you killed her instead of watching other men taking her life?”

“Perhaps,” Hannibal says. “I would feel less… vulnerable. I would feel in control. Mischa would always be with me if I killed her.”

“I see her in the mirror, almost every day,” Will says. “Filled with the flowers you planted in her.”

“Did you grieve her?”

“I grieved myself,” Will whispers. “And she was a reflection of that.”

“It was different from Abigail,” Hannibal concludes.

Will nods. “Abigail… she was what I could have had.” He breathes deeply and presses himself more tightly against Hannibal’s body. “Mischa was what I would have been.”

They lay there in soft silence, and Will feels complete. For the first time in so long, he can close his eyes without seeing Hannibal leave him again and again.

Now you love him, completely. It’s time to fall back into our arms, and embrace me, Will.

Lovers must tumble off cliffs and meet the ocean.

Chapter End Notes

This is probs gonna have a ton of typos, but I’ve been keeping ya’ll waiting for a g e s so... I’ll edit later. If you see any of my writer’s comments (typically either in all caps or in asterisks, PLEASE let me know so I an edit it out T_T I’m too tired at this point).

Tell me what ya’ll think? Any predictions for the next chapter?

Embrace Reality

Chapter Summary

> It is a monstrous love, and it makes monsters of us all. So embrace it. Embrace the truth and embrace me, Will.
>
> Embrace reality.

Chapter Notes

> So... this chapter is really fucking short but I didn't want to fit it into the previous fucking MASSIVE chapter.
>
> (Also, I've been working on this fic for over a year now, so I feel like it's dragging out a bit. I want to give my 100% to the final chapters, but my creative outlets have been in other fandoms so I'm sorry if everything seems a bit lackluster. Also, my writing style has apparently changed a lot?? I re-read the first chapter and I was in shock. Everything is so different now.)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

"Can't live with him, can't live without him. Is that what this is?"

-

Will wakes up with warmth by his side, wrapped around him. There is soft breathing and a slight smell of sweat. He turns his head slightly to see Hannibal, asleep, and vulnerable. A hand snakes out of Hannibal's embrace to reach for his throat, and curious fingers brush against the hollow of Hannibal's throat. Hannibal doesn't respond to the touch, simply lays there, and Will presses down ever so slightly. The skin turns white as he presses down and it stretches over the protruding knobs of Hannibal's collarbone.

"Planning to kill me?" Hannibal murmurs, and Will can't bother feeling guilty.

“No,” Will whispers in response, moving his fingertips to below Hannibal’s jaw. “I don’t want to kill you.” He runs his fingertips across Hannibal’s skin and the stubble on his jaw. He finds the older lines around his mouth and eyes, and a part of him tries to commit all of this to memory. Remember this soft moment. Why does it feel like everything could disappear in an instant?

“How do you feel?” Hannibal asks, and Will has to roll his eyes.

“Sometimes I wonder how the hell I managed to fall for a shrink,” Will mutters.

“You’ll have to forgive me,” Hannibal says, moving a hand to brush the hair from Will’s eyes. His touch is warm. “My curiosity is a terrible thing.”

“Oh yeah, I know,” Will says, looking up to meet Hannbal’s eyes. “I went to jail for your curiosity.”

“You’re never going to forgive me for that, aren’t you?”

“No, I’ve forgiven you. I’m just going to hold it over your head for the rest of our lives.”

“Would it help if I said I’m sorry?”

“I doubt it. Afterall, it led to this, in the grand scheme of things. You don’t feel sorry for what you did to mold me into this.”

“You’re right,” Hannibal says. “I have no regrets of the events, only that they caused more pain than desired.”

Will nods and touches the bone above Hannibal’s eye. “The pain made us, though. It made you, it made me. Mischa, Abigail, us.”

“I hope it no longer needs to mold us,” Hannibal says softly. “I don’t want you to suffer.”

“Hope?” Will asks, raising a brow. “What happened to your god complex? You don’t ‘hope’ for things, you make them happen. You experiment, you lay out frustratingly complex plans, and you stand atop everything, puppet strings in hand.”

Hannibal smiles. “You’re a frustratingly difficult puppet to predict.”

Will snorts. “You gotta work on your compliments, Hannibal.”

“Shall I sweet talk you?” He props himself onto one elbow and gives Will a smirk.

“And weasel your way back into my pants? No thank you,” Will grumbles. Sure, he’s got morning wood, but he’s also a bit tired. He wants to go back to sleep, back into the peaceful slumber that apparently can only be found in Hannibal’s embrace.

Hannibal hums and lays a hand on Will’s neck. “I was thinking more along the lines of your mind. I’m not that young, anymore.”

Will leans into Hannibal’s touch and sighs. He watches the white hairs of Hannibal’s head reflect the morning light. “Do you think about what it would have been like, if we met when we were younger?”

“I have thought about it,” Hannibal admits. “I imagine us meeting during my years at Johns Hopkins. It would have been a sight to see you so young, so alive.”

“What about younger?” Will presses. “Younger than our years at university. What if… what if we knew each other as children? What if I grew up besides you and Mischa?”

Hannibal furrows his brows and his thumb brushes against Will's stubble. "You likely would have been closer with Mischa, especially considering your age," he admits.

"What, would I have only been some annoying toddler to you?" Will snorts. He imagines idyllic gardens and blond hair. Mischa laughing alongside him. A world where he could watch Hannibal grow without the darkness beating in his chest.

"I doubt that," Hannibal says, smiling. "I may have been interested in you, perhaps infatuated with the way your mind worked. But neither of us would have found that darkness inside of us, yet."

Would Hannibal give as much of himself to Will as he did to Mischa? Would Will be permitted to run into Hannibal's arms when the thunder roared too loudly, or would that be a privilege reserved only for Mischa? Would they end up where they are now, covered in blood and in love?

"And it was the darkness that drew us together, wasn't it?" Will whispers, a heavy sigh escaping him. "We aren't bound by anything particularly happy." Not that a happy childhood with Hannibal would last long, anyways. He would die, maybe alongside Mischa, and be a part of the initial pain that molded Hannibal's darkness. Maybe it would be his voice, his name, his shadow, which haunts Hannibal into adulthood.

"We are bound by our acceptance of each other," Hannibal repeats.

Maybe they wouldn't love like this, if they knew each other from birth. Maybe Will would resent Hannibal, for letting Mischa die, for killing so many.

Will didn't run towards Hannibal out of desire — it was out of necessity. He couldn't breathe without Hannibal. He wanted Hannibal the way one wants air. He desired acceptance, he needed it. Once he knew what it was like to be held by steady hands, covered in blood, to be *wanted* entirely, he couldn't throw that away.

"Acceptance of the tragedy in our blood and on our hands," Will murmurs.

Hannibal kisses Will's forehead. "This is what we are, for better or for worse."

Will smiles grimly and lays back down, his hands against Hannibal's skin. So much pain and death for such a small moment. How many of these moments did he have left?

~~~

He looks in the mirror and blinks slowly. He sees Hannibal's faint reflection in the background, rummaging about the place for something, but his own eyes are not a stranger's anymore. He looks into the glass and he realizes that he's looking at himself. He sees himself in the mirror.

There is no Mischa, no flowers, no Clair de Lune.

Hannibal comes up behind him and kisses the nape of his neck softly, and Will shudders at how perfect the image in the mirror is. He belongs next to Hannibal, and the reflection is proof — he finally recognizes himself. He feels awake.

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For some reason, they don't catch the flight to Europe. Neither of them say anything, but there is an understanding between the two of them. They aren't flying to Europe. Instead, they take Will's car and Hannibal starts driving to the seaside.

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"Do you run away or let me stay just within reach?" Will asks. They're at the cliff side, a stupidly expensive house sitting at the edge of a corroding ledge. *There was more land here when I was with Abigail, more land still when I was with Miriam Lass.*
~~~

Hannibal looks up from his book. Will is standing by the window side, hands in pockets, and watching the ocean rage.

“What do you mean?” Hannibal asks from the couch. The sunset draws a line across his relaxed body, over one dark eye.

Will shakes his head lightly. “I keep…” he takes a deep breath and closes his eyes. “I keep expecting you to leave me.”

Hannibal watches him with dark eyes, surrounded by so many lines of age.

“I keep waiting for you to leave me.” Will blinks a few times and sighs. “Will you leave me?”

Hannibal presses his lips together and swiftly stands, gently bookmarking the book and setting it down. He walks over to Will and holds his wrists gently. “I will not leave you, Will. I’m here.”

“Maybe you won’t leave willingly,” Will says softly. “Maybe someone or something will take you away from me.”

Hannibal’s forehead creases and he holds Will’s wrists a little tighter. “I’m not leaving you, Will. Nothing will take me away.”

“Then why do I keep hearing glass breaking?” Will asks. “I… I feel strange. I feel stable, so fucking stable with you here, but I keep hearing things. Seeing things. But I don’t feel crazy. I know I’m not crazy. But I keep hearing the ocean and a dragon screaming.” Everything feels like a fantasy world.

Hannibal brings Will forward and holds him in a tight embrace. “I’m here, Will. I don’t know what will happen next, I have no control over the world.” Will snorts at that. “It’s true. What

will happen, will happen. The world will go on being horrible, wonderful, beautifully cruel, and I still stay beside you."

Will nods and holds Hannibal, fingers pressing into Hannibal's torso to feel his ribs. "Nothing can tear us apart."

Nothing but each other.

~~~

"When life becomes maddeningly polite, think about me Will, think about me."

~~~

"I intend to watch him change you."

A split lip and a body too tall and too folded in on itself. It growls, snarls, and watches them with bloody intentions. When it stands, it unfurls with leather wings and a dragon's screech fills the air.

"Save yourself, kill them all."

"I don't know if I can save myself."

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Will. Will, please wake up.
~~~

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“Will?”

Will turns his head and smiles at Hannibal. He holds out a hand. “Join me.” His voice is steady, calm. His heart hammers in his ears.

Hannibal slowly walks towards Will and the cliffside he stands on. He places his hand in Will’s. Trust. Vulnerability.

“Can you hear it?” Will asks softly. “The ocean’s song?”

“What does it sound like, to you?” Hannibal turns the question back to Will.

Will smiles. “You’d think it’d sound angry. A cacophony of sounds crashing against the rocks. Maybe even a lament. But… it’s calm. It’s beautiful.”

Hannibal squeezes Will’s hand lightly. “Does it call out to you?”

Will nods. “A siren’s song.”

“What do the sirens ask of you?” Hannibal asks. “Do they ask you to jump, and leave me?”

Will shakes his head. “No. They’re asking me to find you.” He turns his head to Hannibal and breathes deeply, salt filling his nostrils. “To embrace you.”

Hannibal is silent.
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“The collision of water onto rock isn’t angry. It’s happy. Content. this is how it must always be. This cliff must always erode. The waves must always crash against the stones.” Will closes his eyes. “Everything is as it should be.”

Fall, Will. Fall into the arms of the ocean. Come back to us, Will. Come back. Come back to me.

Will takes another step, the siren call of the ocean singing in his blood. Hannibal follows him with steady steps.

Fall into our embrace. Let our songs fill your lungs and burn your throat.

“I love you, Will,” Hannibal whispers, almost urgently, as if they were running out of time. “I have loved you since the moment you saw me, saw me as what I truly am, and I wish we could live together in harmony.”

“Me too,” Will whispers. “God, me too.”

They both stare out into the ocean, watching the clouds roll across the sky and pour their tears into the earth beneath. Distant thunder murmurs and the crashing of the waves sing their siren song.

Hannibal draws Will closer and kisses him softly. “I wish it didn’t have to be like this.” The words are spoken with a finality. Acceptance fills them.

They have to fall. They have to fall, not only to answer the siren call, but because the world would burn if they didn’t. Hannibal loves him, he loves Hannibal, and it hurts. It hurts.

But he has to fall. He has to wake up and—

Drown, dearest William. Drown in this dream.

Will tugs him towards the edge, kissing him back. “Me too.”

“I love you, Will,” Hannibal whispers, and it is slowly pressed into Will’s lips. As if they have all of eternity. “I love you.”

“I know,” he whispers.

“But do you ache for him?” Her voice is slow, on edge. She sits before a monster with too many eyes and too much teeth, but she is brave, oh so brave. She leans forward, playing a game she knows she may not survive. So clever, so brave, Bedelia.

“I love you,” Will says. He closes his eyes and he begins to shake. “I love you, Hannibal.”

There is pain in Hannibal’s expression, pain, and relief.

“There is nothing in my life that isn’t you,” Will says, looking out to the ocean. “And I forgave you for burning everything else in my world. I forgave you for everything — for Abigail.” He looks back to Hannibal.

“And have you forgiven yourself for forgiving me?” Hannibal whispers.

Will nods gently. “Yes.”

“Have you forgiven yourself for loving me?”

“Yes,” Will chokes out.

Hannibal nods and kisses him softly, both of his hands on Will's face, thumbs brushing Will's cheekbones and eyes.

"Come find me."

Will nods and drags him to the edge. They have to fall.

Come back to me, my Will.

Will closes his eyes and they both fall limp, dropping silently over the edge of the cliff. The wind rushes in their ears, curling around their bodies, slamming against their skin. They were always destined to fall like this, weren't they?

Will kisses Hannibal as they fall. He scrambles to hold him, to have him, and his brush of lips against lips is desperate. They breath into each other's mouths rather than kissing — loud, desperate gasps.

The things we do for a love like this are ugly, mad, full of sweat and regret.

Hannibal clutches to him tightly, like a newborn babe clinging to their mother. His hands dig into Will's skin, breaking the surface and inviting blood to meet the air. The pain is nothing in Will's mind.

This love burns you, maims you, twists you inside out.

They are tightly woven into each other when the water slams against their bodies, bones breaking and skin bruising. Water rushes all around them, filling their lungs and burning their throats. Desperate gasps for oxygen are taken, their bodies fighting against death as their minds fall into nothingness.

It is a monstrous love, and it makes monsters of us all. So embrace it. Embrace the truth and embrace me, Will.

Embrace reality.

~~~

"When children experience trauma, they often fall back to a previous stage in their development, they return to a time they felt most safe. A paracosm is similar, the goal being to step out of reality because it is too difficult to process. Sometimes these imaginary worlds interfere with reality, and they do not know what is real and what is not."

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"He's waking up!"

A heart monitor sounds, constantly, beeping out a lifeline.

"Go get Dr. Gregory."

"Yes sir."

The lifeline keeps beeping.

~~~

Will jerks awake to blinding light, air in his lungs, and the smile on his stomach aching.
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“This is all I ever wanted for you, Will. For both of us.”

The echo of a knife plunges into Will’s stomach and he gasps for air. The whisper of a saw drags itself across his forehead. The memory of a knife buries itself into Will’s cheek. The burn of old water fills Will’s lungs. He thinks he screams.

Memories flood his mind, slamming against his skull and burning into his eyes. He sees broken mirrors and crooked teeth. A dragon roars as a glass pane shows him his reflection alongside the image of Hannibal. He sees his own hand resting against that glass, watching Hannibal watch him on the other side. He hears sirens and Jack’s tired voice when he makes yet another deal with the devil. He watches the wine in his glass as Hannibal wheezes at his feet, a dragon prowling too close for comfort. He remembers the rush of wind as he falls with Hannibal in his arms, a twisted sense of peace filling him.

“It’s beautiful.”

Chapter End Notes

You know, originally, the plan was to end it once they fell of the cliff.

But... nope! I made it even more tragic than the original ending. And what is more tragic than killing them off???

Making them live.

(It’s a bittersweet ending, don’t worry. Not too depressing. I’m not that mean. AND the final chapter is already written, just undergoing some final edits. It’ll be published in a couple days — hopefully.)

TELL ME WHAT YOU THINK OF MY ANGST ABILITIES.

Kintsukuroi

Chapter Summary

A Japanese method for repairing broken ceramics with a special lacquer mixed with gold, silver, or platinum. The philosophy behind the technique is to recognize the history of the object and to visibly incorporate the repair into the new piece instead of disguising it.

Chapter Notes

The epilogue is here, guys. Really short, but I like to think that it doesn't need to be long. This is the denouement, the bow on the package. I didn't want to put it with the previous chapter because.... you know, tension. So you get two short final chapters.

PLEASE READ:
I want to explicitly state why Mischa existed in Will's dream, (I kinda explained it, but this makes it a bit more clear, I guess).

Hannibal has only ever really loved two people: Mischa and Will. There are parallels between her and Abigail (obviously) but I also feel that are parallels between her and Will. In this fic, she represents Will's fear of rejection from Hannibal as well as his desire to be loved by Hannibal. She's a scared child, scared of Hannibal but also of being abandoned by him — and Will (to an extent) is terrified of his love for Hannibal.

She died because Will relived the grief of losing Abigail and because her death represented the lengths to which Will would go to for Hannibal.

Long story short: Mischa is how Will's mind tried to process Abigail's death, Hannibal's love, and his own love for Hannibal. He put himself in the shoes of the only other person Hannibal has loved.

PLEASE ENJOY THE FINAL CHAPTER OF THE DEVIL'S DESIGN

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is awake, and the voices are gone.

Frances Dolarhyde is dead. Abigail Hobbs is dead. Alana Bloom is alive. Margot Verger is alive. Mason Verger is dead.

Is Hannibal alive?

He lays there, tired, broken, and finally awake. He's awake, but he doesn't wish to open his eyes, because once he does, he knows that this bittersweet dream will vanish and he must face reality. A reality where he was too scared to love Hannibal in that kitchen, a reality where Hannibal had to cut his love into Will.

A reality where teacups are broken and stay broken.

"I love you."

He clenches his teeth shut, groaning at the pain that is everywhere, and he opens his eyes, blinking at the harsh yellow light of the hospital room.

He's awake now. Awake, and clutching his stomach, where a wide white smile stretches across it.

"Hannibal?" He whispers, his mouth dry and his tongue sandpaper against the roof of his mouth, turning his head and wincing at the pain in his neck. "Hannibal?" He sounds pathetic to his own ears.

No one responds, and he is alone in the room. No voice whispers into his ear about drowning and love. He is alone in this world.

A nurse comes in an hour later, an eternity later, a moment later. She smiles and introduces herself as Annabelle Procel, explaining that she spoke to him when he first woke up, but it's likely that he does not remember her. Her name tag burns itself into his eyes. With a gentle voice, she explains that he fell off a cliff. Someone found his body. A man brought him in. They don't know who he was.

“He asked us to give you this,” the nurse says, fumbling with a small box on the bed stand. She hands it to him, and Will’s unsteady hands grasp it and place it on his lap. It’s a simple grey box, tied with twine, no note attached. So Hannibal is alive, and expects him to know what he means by whatever is inside.

“Do you know who brought you in?” She asks, head cocking to the side and her expression kind. She’s pretty, sharp cheekbones and dark eyes. Her smile is gentle and her touch is kind. She looks like Hannibal. She looks like Mischa.

“I can suspect,” Will rasps, his voice broken and pathetic.

The nurse gives her silence to urge him on.

“He was a… a friend,” Will murmurs. “Or maybe something more than a friend.” He laughs bitterly, his ribs protesting against the movement. “Even if I tell you everything I know, you won’t find him. He won’t let you find him.”

She’s obviously confused by his words, but he can see her writing it off as a crazy man’s words. Of course, he’s insane, after all. Death drove him insane.

“How long have I been out?” Will asks, changing the subject to her obvious relief.

“You’ve been in and out for four days, sir,” she says. “We weren’t sure if you’d wake up. There was a lot of internal bleeding and head trauma.”

“Is there anyone waiting for me?” He asks quietly. *Or am I alone?*

“A man came in this morning, named Dr Fell. He said he was a colleague and that he’d be coming back later this evening.”

“Did he give an exact time?” Will muses under his breath, turning his head to stare out at the window, watching the rain fall. He doesn’t even know where he is, for God’s sake. He should probably ask.

“Six thirty, sir,” she states, all prim and proper. Innocent.

The rain reminds him of the final moments of his dream, and thunder crashes, filling the room with light. He sees Annabelle Procel flinch at the sound.

“Thanks,” Will says, and he tries to give her as genuine a smile as possible. She’s done nothing wrong to him except sear her face into his mind.

She nods and begins to turn away. “I’ll go let the doctor know you’re awake.”

More thunder sounds and she all but runs away.

Once she’s gone, he turns his attention to the little grey box, gingerly stroking it’s sides. *What have you left for me today, Hannibal?* He undoes the twine with shaking fingers, groaning at the pain in his shoulders. Falling off a cliff really isn’t fun, isn’t it? The twine falls limp around the box, useless now, and he carefully lifts the lid, muttering a curse when the lid doesn’t come off all the way. Eventually, the lid is separated from the box, and he peers inside, heart hammering in his chest, waiting to be broken again.

White and blue meets his eyes. White and blue shards of porcelain, tucked away into a nest of silk.

A broken teacup.

A bitter, heartless laugh escapes him and stabs his lungs and ribs. He groans in pain and he can’t properly tell if the tears are from the physical pain or the emotional pain. Probably both.

You gave me your broken heart.

No, the man bent and molded into a heart was Hannibal's metaphor for his broken heart. The man left in the church was his broken heart. This teacup, this isn't his heart. This is the dream he dreamed, the world he made for Abigail and Will. This was his gift to Will. *Is* his gift.

And I broke it.

He has no more tears to cry, and after too many deaths and wounds and years, he isn't scared anymore. He isn't scared of what he might see in the mirror. He isn't scared of seeing Mischa in his heart.

~~~

There's a little TV in his room, and Annabelle gives him the remote when he asks. He flicks through different comedy channels, some shows, and then news. When he switches onto some local channel, he glimpses the dead body of the Dragon and the yellow lines of the FBI scattered around him. He turns it off immediately.

So he really is awake. He closes his eyes and tries to sleep the rest of the day away, hoping for no more dreams.

~~~

At six thirty, a man sits on the small and rather pathetic couch next to Will's bed. Will wakes up at six forty, and he doesn't have to open his eyes to know that he's there. When he does open them, a small, sad smile paints itself on his lips.

"Hello, Dr Lecter."

Hannibal's eyes flick up to meet his. His hair is shorter, greyer, and his eyes older. There are scars flicked across his face, where the fall and the Dragon broke skin. "Hello, Will." Scars that Will doesn't recognize.

"Where did you get your medical treatment?" Will asks softly. "A friend who owed you?" His voice is scratchy and he sounds like shit. No poetry Hannibal can write out of his ass will romanticize this.

"An associate," Hannibal muses. His body creaks and aches like Will's, and his voice is only slightly better than Will's. "Although I doubt he wants to continue being associates."

Will manages a small chuckle, but even that hurts his ribs and he winces. Hannibal is instantly rising and holding Will's wrist, rubbing his thumb comfortingly.

"Why did you throw us off that cliff?" Hannibal whispers, brushing a strand of hair out of Will's eyes. His eyes are fond, but Will can see red hot anger in them. Will smirks — more of grimace, with the bruises and lacerations across his face. Hannibal is angry. Not all so loving and kind and forgiving.

As if you don't know. "Can't live with you," Will repeats. "Can't live without you."

There is a pain in Hannibal's eyes that wasn't there in the other world, in the bittersweet dream of Mischa's second chance, and it should haunt Will, but it doesn't. Sure, it hurts to look at those eyes that are empty, blank, and unyielding, but it reminds Will of the truth. Of reality. This is real. Hannibal was adoring, fond, eternally forgiving of Will's sins in the other world. This Hannibal is angry and tired. He's angry at Will for throwing them off a cliff. He's angry at Will for lying to him. He's angry for not having the strength to kill Will. He's angry at Will's reluctance. He's angry and terrifyingly tired of being entirely in love with the mess that is Will Graham.

Loving Will is a shitfest. Hannibal knows this. But how could he stop loving Will — the only person who understands Hannibal's cracked soul and cold mind? Even worse, Will loves Hannibal back. He craves the acceptance and embrace that only Hannibal can provide. Their love is bitter, brutal, and consuming, but it's the most real love they've ever had. It's unforgiving and bloody — befitting of monsters.

Hannibal nods and sits back down, but on Will's cot. Will tries to scoot over to make room, but Hannibal has to keep his feet on the ground to support and balance himself.

"And yet, neither of us seem to be able to die, together or apart," Hannibal says softly, his thumb on Will's hand brushing across the bruises and cuts.

There was distance between them when they fell off the cliff. There was acceptance — a heavy pant of *"it's beautiful"* — but distance. There was still pain for Abigail, guilt when she 'died' in Will's mouth and died on Hannibal's kitchen floor. Hannibal was still a monster. The problem was, Will was never known so intimately by another person, and that was all he really craved. To be known. So he took Hannibal's hand and kissed him with blood in his mouth.

Now, he understands Hannibal. The grief he felt for Abigail was a mirror to Hannibal's grief for Mischa, and when Will realized this in his dream, forgiveness settled into his bones. Not forgiveness for Hannibal's sins, but for Will's shitty love for Hannibal.

"I thought death would be merciful," Will murmurs.

"For who?" Hannibal asks. "For us or the world?"

"Both," Will mutters. "I hate it. The… the necessity of your presence in your life."

Hannibal does not chuckle like he would in the dream, instead his face is hard and Will sees his mind shifting through responses.

"I had Molly. Walter. Good times. Normal times," he says. Molly's name is sand in his mouth. He never could stay with her, not even in his dreams — she deserves better.

“I doubt either of us truly desire the normal, Will,” Hannibal says, his voice low and threatening. Will has tried to kill them, and Will can see the imaginary twitch of Hannibal’s hands. The urge to strangle Will is definitely there. He wants to laugh at that — the stupid itch they both seem to have, the itch to drive a knife into the other, the need to wrap their hands around the other’s throat and squeeze too tightly.

“I thought I did,” Will says. “But I don’t. It was painful, living that life. I couldn’t live without you, I couldn’t pretend to be *normal* .”

“You don’t have to,” Hannibal whispers, his voice a caress. In the dream it would have been loving, tender, a plea. Here, it is closer to a demand. “We can run away together, and I promise to do a better job of protecting you, this time.”

Will chokes out a hacking laugh, his lungs nearly ripping and his ribs screaming. “I’m tired of *running* , Hannibal,” Will says, coughing. “I’m done running.”

“So, shall we live out the rest of our lives at opposite ends of a psych ward? Bulletproof glass and unkind guards separating us from the rest of the world and each other?” Hannibal huffs and all but sneers.

“I don’t know,” Will snaps. “Why can’t we just…”

“Just what, Will?” Hannibal asks. “Be happy? Content? Safe?”

“Together.” Will thinks back to Mischa’s staggering frame as she collapsed in front of Hannibal, running towards him for her entire life. “Together and nothing more.”

Hannibal softens at that. His eyes grow gentle and he lowers his head, as if in shame.

I want this to be intimate.

Give yourself to me.

Lose yourself in me.

Will shakes his head. “But it looks like being together brings nothing but *pain.”*

“Will,” Hannibal whispers. “We are conjoined,” he repeats. “Separation will kill us.”

“Being together will kill us,” Will whispers. They’ve tried to kill each other more times than their enemies have tired to.

“No,” Hannibal says. “The world will persecute us for being together. The act of being truly intimate with one another will not kill us. The world will merely hate us for it and label us as dangerous.”

“But we are dangerous,” Will muses. “They have a right to label as dangerous.”

Hannibal hums, as if in agreement. “We are dangerous.”

“To the world and to each other,” Will mutters.

Hannibal raises a brow. “Still scared of me?”

Will huffs and smiles slightly, stitches pulling at his skin. “Always.” He brings a bandaged hand to Hannibal’s face with effort, the muscles straining underneath their bandages, and he sighs. “But I love you.”

Hannibal freezes and watches Will with expressionless eyes.

“You’re a shitty person but I love you so goddamn much,” Will whispers. “And I know you love me.” he presses his hand against Hannibal’s face weakly. “So, kiss me?”

Hannibal barely hesitates. There is no gentle embrace, no careful touches. Hanniabl grabs Will’s battered face with calloused hands and kisses him with a single press of dry lips. He pulls back to open his eyes and watch Will, searching for a lie, a trick, anything. Will gives him a sad smile and Hannibal kisses him again, breathing heavily against Will’s skin.

“I loved you then,” Hannibal whispers with a deep voice. Will remembers flashes of police sirens and Hannibal kneeling in the snow. “Even then.” He remembers the Dragon setting up to film the death of the Chesapeake Ripper. “Even now.”

“Sorry I took so long,” Will mutters as Hannibal kisses him again. His stitches and bruises hurt, and Hannibal’s knee presses into his waist too roughly. The pain feels real.

This is their tragedy. It isn’t one of unrequited love — no, it’s worse. They love each other, their vicious love for one another is returned, and look at how many people died because they kept trying to come to terms with it or deny it.

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“I dreamed about Mischa when I was in the coma,” Will murmurs. It’s been a couple days, and apparently Hanniabl has paid everyone off to make sure the police don’t catch wind of their presence for a while.

“What was she doing in your dreams?” Hannibal muses.

Will eyes him. “What, are you the only one who’s allowed to dream about her?”
~~~

“You’ve never seen her, never interacted with her,” Hannibal says. “I wonder how she behaved.”

Will huffs. “The nurse here — Annabelle Procel — I apparently imagined Mischa to look a lot like her.”

Hannibal blinks. “You dreamt of Mischa as an adult?”

Will nods. “The dream was… shit… it was closer to a *paracosm* than a dream, if I’m being honest.”

“Describe it to me,” Hannibal says, leaning forward on his elbows, the same way he would during their ‘conversations.’

“It was beautiful.” Will smiles. The skin on his cheeks hurts less now. “It started in the kitchen, where you killed Abigail.”

Hannibal watches Will’s lips. “I imagine that you rewrote the events.”

“Yes,” Will murmurs. *I rewrote our tragedy. For you. For us.* “Abigail lived. I… I managed to convince you that I was loyal. That I loved you.”

“Was it a trick, on your part?” Hannibal asks, always haunted by the betrayal that Will kept giving to Hannibal.

Will shakes his head. “No. It was… initially driven by fear, but it wasn’t a lie. You were standing there, knife in hand, and instead of doing *nothing* and ending up dead, I kissed you.”

Hannibal pauses at that and smirks slightly. “Did you?”

“Fuck off,” Will mutters. “I kissed you, you kissed me back, and we ran away to Florence with Abigail in tow. And we all lived,” Will whispers, blinking away the tears at the memory of Hannibal in the sun and Abigail playing the piano. “We ran away together, to Florence, and we *lived* .”

-

“A place was made for Abigail in your world,” Hannibal murmurs. “For all of us. Together.”

-

Hannibal laughs, the sound loving on Will’s ears. “ I am happy, Will.” He shifts Will in his arms so they lay beside each other, eyes meeting. “I am—” He brushes a strand of hair from Will’s eyes. “— content.”

-

Hannibal is silent.

“We loved,” Will mutters, angry at the world yet fond of the memories of a bitter dream. “We made love in the dead of night, coated in blood. We made love in the middle of the day, the sunlight streaming into the windows and making your hair gold.”

Will glances up to see blank eyes and a broken heart.

“We were happy,” he chokes out, his chest shaking from the pain. “We were alive.” His words are almost an accusation. A plea. A question, silently begging why Abigail had to die. Why they had to die. Why they had to survive separation.

Our lives became a palimpsest, where the tragedy was just a bad dream.

Hannibal leans back, crossing his legs and lacing his fingers together to rest on his knee. Will recognizes this as Hannibal trying to distance himself from the pain. From the guilt that Hannibal isn't used to feeling. "Did you find Mischa in Florence?"

"She found us," Will corrects, blinking away angry tears. "The dream was told from my point of view, but also hers. She worked with the FBI, but under false pretenses." He thinks back to her confident smiles with Alana and Jack. "She was after you. She met us under false pretenses, knowing that you wouldn't believe her to be real if she told us the truth immediately."

"I know Mischa is dead," Hannibal says softly.

Will nods. "After a few months, maybe a year, she was revealed to us. You sensed trouble and sent someone to kill her, similar to how you sent someone to kill me. You didn't really want her dead, you wanted to see what would happen."

Hannibal huffs. "And what happened?"

"Abigail caught wind of your plan and went to her. We followed Abigail and Mischa broke down, confessing the truth." Will thinks back to her shrunken calf and the pale reflections of the moon's light on her prosthetic leg. The sounds of her pleading cries still ring clearly in his mind. "Then all hell broke loose."

-

"No!" She shouts, whirling around to point a shaking finger at Hannibal. "Do not tell me that it is okay that someone else is dead. Do not tell me that killing another one of my friends is okay!" Her whole body trembles like a leaf in a hurricane. Trembling like she's choking on her own blood. "You killed everyone in my life! Marissa!" She turns to look at Will. "My dad! Nicholas! You won't have anything in my life that isn't you!"

-

“Don’t talk to me of failure,” he whispers, his words curling around her. His eyes grin cruelly as he speaks next. “You, a mother who unstrung the body of her own daughter from the ceiling, knowing where the blame lies. You, a woman living in a web so thick of lies that you’ve lost your identity. You, a child who burned in the snow.”

-

Will continues, “Mischa wasn’t Mischa, though she believed she was. She was manipulated for her entire life to believe that she was your sister, and she spent her entire life searching for you and your love.”

-

“If, for whatever reason, you must choose between saving Abigail’s or Will’s life,” Hannibal whispers urgently, his voice reaching only her ears. “Save Will.”

-

Her breathing becomes erratic and she clings onto Hannibal desperately. “I don’t even know who I am,” she cries, burying her face against Hannibal’s shoulder, crying with shudders racking through her body. “I don’t want to die like this. I don’t want to die.”

“I know, I know,” Hannibal whispers soothingly.

“Don’t let me die like this, Hannibal,” she gasps, the tears streaming down her face and staining it. “Don’t let me go.”

-

“She died for you, and you grew flowers in her body,” Will murmurs.

“Why did you dream of Mischa, in your coma?” Hannibal asks, his eyes steady on Will’s face. “Why not Abigail, or only us?”

“I dreamed in my perspective and hers,” Will repeats. “I… I felt her pain. Her agony as she destroyed herself for you, over and over.” He bites at the inside of his cheek, drawing blood and he curses his stitches. “When we fell off that cliff, I had accepted the fact that I was stuck with your cannibalistic ass. I didn’t accept my love for you. I accepted the necessity of your presence, but there was no…”

“Joy?” Hannibal suggests, inwardly smug, but not outwardly so. Most would say he looks innocent but Will knows him better. “No joy, no celebrating in our love?”

“No,” Will says. “There was only pain. So, to process your love and my own, I put myself in the shoes of the only other person you have ever loved.”

“Mischa,” Hannibal murmurs.

“She was an echo, but not of Abigail. The dream wasn’t about my grief for Abigail, even if it included it. It was about my absolute agony when faced with the fact that I love you.” Will breathes deeply and sighs. “She was my echo.”

“And why make Mischa… a fake? Why not dream of a true Mischa who survived? Why dream of an imposter?” Hannibal asks.

“She was manipulated,” Will says. “She was molded into Mischa, ever since she was a child. She had no choice but to love you.”

“By making her no less sincere but also an imposter who was made by distant puppet masters, you made her more relatable,” Hannibal concludes.

Will nods. “I was Jack’s bloodhound. I went mad for him. I went mad for you, but you were also my clarity.” He chuckles. “My only clarity.”

“Do you feel powerless, in the position you have been placed in?” Hannibal asks, a dangerous edge to his voice. Will has to sigh.

“No, I don’t,” Will mutters. “This is my best position to be in — right by your side.”

Hannibal huffs out a small laugh. “Do you truly think that? You have tried to run from me for so long, and then only ran towards me to kill me. Do you truly belong beside me?”

Will smiles. “Yes. Took me a while to accept it, to embrace it, but yeah, I am content. I’m… at peace with it. Only took me a massively complex dream to figure it all out.”

“How beautiful your mind is,” Hannibal murmurs, his eyes soft in awe. Will can see the slight twinge of fear in his frame — fear of being a wonder by Will again — but Will sees hope in his eyes. Hope that Will will finally stay with Hannibal, stay willingly with no ulterior motive. “An entire world constructed in your mind, all to help you process your grief and your fear of our relationship.”

“By diving into the life of another, I learned to understand myself.” Will sighs. “Imagine having enough mirror neurons to live out the life of someone who’s been dead for over 30 years.”

Hannibal smirks. “It’s easier to distance ourselves from the pain, to see the same pain in others rather than in ourselves.”

“Yeah,” Will mutters. “It was bliss, though, in the dream. Bliss, living in Florence with you.”

-

For how long has Will wanted to do this? Kiss Hannibal senseless and break the man apart under his hands? Once upon a time, this was a desire for murder, a seething hatred that drove Will. Now, that desire to slit Hannibal's throat has become something sexual, romantic, even. He wants to watch Hannibal break apart at the seams with moans escaping his lips and lust pounding through his blood. He wants to stand above Hannibal and make him beg for release. He wants to kiss Hannibal softly in the morning, being the only witness to his bedhead and horrible morning breath. He wants to lean in whenever he wants and just kiss him, no questions asked.

And in this world, he could have it all.

It's so easy, too easy, arching into Hannibal's touch and kissing his soft, warm, gentle lips. He can feel Hannibal's joy radiating off him when he kisses him harder and moans softly, almost silently, against his touches. He can feel that joy reflected in himself, and it's damningly euphoric.

-

"Is this intimacy?" Will whispers against Hannibal's lips. "Is this what you wanted?"

Hannibal kisses him with unsteady lips. "This is the beginning. The beginning of... everything."

-

Like this, with his eyes watching Will as if Hannibal was the predator and Will his unfortunate prey, Hannibal is the image of sin. Perhaps not Hannibal's image of it, with pallid demons and marble creatures, but this is how Will imagines it. Hannibal is the Devil, beautiful, oh so beautiful, and emerged in the pleasures of the flesh. The sex and the sin and the death, all a prelude, foreplay, to the climax.

-

Mischa puts a loving hand on Will's shoulder, guiding him into her arms. "Sometimes it's okay to become a ruin, for love."

-

But this is the room where he had kissed her and imagined Hannibal, where he had loved her and imagined Hannibal, where he had pushed gently into her and imagined Hannibal, where he had shaken with pleasure only because he thought of Hannibal.

-

"I want that bliss," Will admits softly. He meets Hannibal's gaze.

"Let me give it to you," Hannibal murmurs. "Heal, and then follow me."

Will shakes his head. "I'm done following you to places. You're not leading me anywhere, we're going together. As one. We're equals."

Hannibal nods. "Of course."

Will smiles. "If I follow you places, there's the risk of rejection — Mischa represented that as well. My fear of… giving everything to you, only to be turned away."

"Your time in prison must be to blame for that," Hannibal says.

Will rolls his eyes. "Yeah. Totally. it was prison that broke me, and not your games and lies."

Hannibal laughs softly, and Will smiles to himself — his dreams recreated that laugh perfectly.

“My devilish designs,” Hannibal murmurs. “Is that what is to blame?”

“Maybe,” Will quips. “But my designs fixed everything. So I forgive you.”

Hannibal smiles. “I forgive you.”

~~~

When Will is only in a couple casts and able to move around enough, Hannibal and Will sign out of the hospital, ignoring the terrified looks of several members of staff. Hannibal also meets Annabelle Procel and he gives her a toothy smile, frightening her, much to Will’s displeasure.

“You aren’t wrong,” Hannibal says later on, when they’re driving away in a stolen car.

“About what?” Will asks, staring out the window. “I’m rarely wrong about anything.”

Hannibal smiles and glances over at Will, who’s sitting in the passenger’s seat with stitches on his forehead and his lips far too dry. He’s ignoring Hannibal’s quick gaze. “Annabelle Procel,” Hannibal says. “She does look like Mischa.”

Will huffs out a laugh. “Never doubt my brain and it’s designs, Hannibal.”

“Never.”

Fin
~~~

BONUS:

(The cover I drew for this fic, which is basically Mischa from her death scene, but submerged in water to reference Will's dream and how he's basically drowning the entire time)

Chapter End Notes

And yes... in case you didn't get it... the entire fic was a fucking dream.

Why did I do that? Well, you see, I wanted Will and Hannibal to survive the fall, and I wanted Will to realize what he could have had if he didn't betray Hannibal. I knew that the whole thing with Mischa would be filled with plot holes, so I decided to fill them in with knowing that the entire thing is in Will's head, so therefore some things won't make sense.

(Also, some symbolism: Procel means keeper of secrets, and DuBois was a reference to A Streetcar Named Desire, where Blanche DuBois lost herself in a world she made in her mind)

And yes, I've planned this since the beginning! I wrote the last chapter a couple days after I published the... third one? I've always known how this bad boy was gonna end.

Please comment and tell me what you thought of this monster of a fic! I wanna know!

Thank you all soooooo much for reading!!! Some of y'all have stuck with this fic for over a year, and always comment?? You guys are literally the reason why I kept writing this. THANK YOU

(Now I'm onto Birdsong, a BNHA DabiHawks fic. Check it out if you're in that fandom! I can't believe I'm done with this fic.... after an entire y e a r, it's kind of a lot to process. I feel sad???? Like.... it's over.... so much work and tears.... thank you guys soooooo much for reading y'all mean the world to me.)

Bye!

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!